OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

THE MAKING OF KATAKIS

INSIDE THE RAINBOW ARTS SHMUP THAT WAS NEARLY SHOT DOWN BY ACTIVISION

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DISCOVER THE ORIGINS OF THE ALL-CONQUERING FPS SERIES

THE 2600 RETURNS!

HOW ATARI'S ICONIC CONSOLE IS GETTING A MAKEOVER

DOUBLE BILL

STAR WARS

DARK FORCES AND STARFIGHTER

NIGHTDIVE ON REMASTERING DARK FORCES + A BEHIND-THE-SCENES LOOK AT STARFIGHTER & JEDI STARFIGHTER

ULTIMATE GUIDE: LED STORM

HOW CAPCOM TRANSFORMED ITS HIGH-OCTANE ARCADE RACER

COLLECTING DONKEY KONG GAMES

YOU'LL GO BANANAS WHEN YOU SEE THE PRICE OF SOME OF DK'S GAMES

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FUTURE

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT WOULD YOU ADD TO THE NEW REMASTER OF STAR WARS: DARK FORCES?

DARRAN JONES

I'd like to see a physical release, that way I won't need to seek out the inferior PlayStation version.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Dredge*
Favourite game of all time: *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*

TIM EMPEY

The timeline probably doesn't work, but stick Starkiller from *The Force Unleashed* in there.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *Starfield*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

A third-person camera mode would be the ideal inclusion for me, but it's not a realistic request, so sadly I feel like I'll have to skip this one.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Hard Edge*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

Maybe a campaign or two featuring some of the more recent *Star Wars* characters such as Cassian Andor, Hondo Ohnaka or The Bad Batch.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *Total War: Rome Remastered - RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

RORY MILNE

Dark Forces originally had Luke Skywalker as its protagonist instead of Kyle Katarn. It would be all sorts of cool if the remaster has Luke as an unlockable player character.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

ANDREW FISHER

Lots of hidden characters and weapons from the whole *Star Wars* saga.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Xenotilt: Hostile Pinball Action*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

GRAEME MASON

Given the original has no vertical mouselook, adding that would be a great start!
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing: *Starfield*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*

DAVID CROOKES

For me, a perfect remaster is one that feels like the game you played back in the day but with updated graphics. I'd just like things to be kept simple.
Expertise: Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, *Dizzy* and PlayStation 2 (but is it retro? Debate!)
Currently playing: *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*
Favourite game of all time: *Broken Sword*

MARTYN CARROLL

This was just *Doom* set in the *Star Wars* universe right? So how about a *Doom* crossover? Taking out Jabba The Hutt with a chainsaw? Let's make it happen.
Expertise: Sinclair stuff
Currently playing: *The Legend Of Zelda: Tears Of The Kingdom*
Favourite game of all time: *Jet Set Willy*

LOADING...

I can still remember the first time I experienced *Star Wars: Dark Forces*. One of my friends at work had been raving about their new *Doom* beater for what had seemed like an eternity. I finally had a chance to visit their home and see what the fuss was all about. Thankfully, LucasArts' game certainly didn't disappoint.

Aside from the striking visuals and authentic-sounding audio, what really struck me at the time about *Dark Forces* was just how immersive it felt – like I was actually in the *Star Wars* universe. What a delight then, to not only revisit the original game, but to also find out how Nightdive Studios' new remaster is coming along.

Our *Star Wars* double bill continues with a look at *Starfighter* and *Jedi Starfighter*, two games that were designed to bring the experience of PC games like *TIE Fighter* to home consoles (the first would also eventually appear on PC). The space theme continues with our legacy feature on the *Gradius* series and the creation of *Katakis*, including Factor 5's Amiga version.

Issue 251 also features a huge article on the creation of the original *Call Of Duty*, excellent retrospectives on *Hogs Of War* and *LED Storm*, a collector's guide to *Donkey Kong* games and a behind-the-scenes look at *Callahan's Crosstime Saloon*. There's plenty more to discover, including an excellent subs offer on page 28.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

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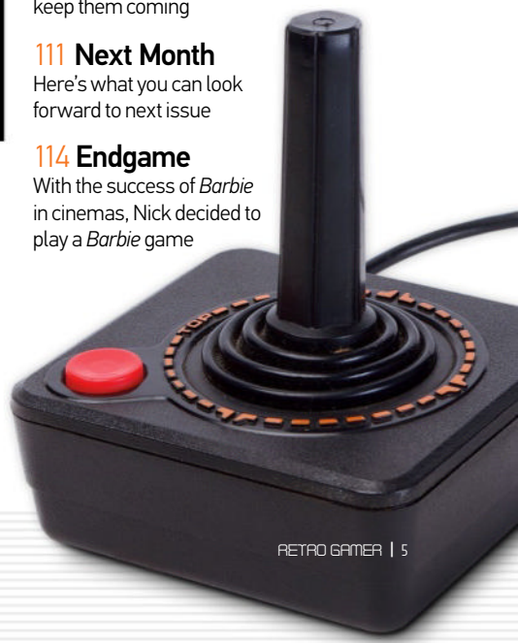
The Making Of: Katakis

A host of 8-bit veterans recall the creation of Manfred Trenz's controversial shmup



» The Atari 2600+ is much smaller than the original, but retains the classic Seventies styling.

SUPER SUMMER

The warm months brought some hot retro prospects

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Nick continues his journey into the early months of 2008

Recent weeks have seen an absolute blitz of retro announcements, with Atari pulling out the biggest of the bunch by unveiling a new console. The Atari 2600+ is a trimmed down four-switch version of the classic woodgrain console, compatible with both classic controllers and cartridges – and in a nice touch, includes the ability to play Atari 7800 cartridges too. The system will use software emulation, and offers modern niceties such as HDMI output and a widescreen toggle. The package includes a CX40+ joystick modelled after the original, and a cartridge featuring ten games including classics such as *Adventure*, *Combat* and *Yars' Revenge*.

» The incoming enhanced version of *Berzerk* will accompany the Atari 2600+ at launch this winter.

The console will be available via Atari and Amazon in North America, but a variety of different retail partners have been chosen for the console in other territories, with Amazon being the exclusive retailer for the UK. The system will sell for £99.99/€119.99/$129.99, with Amazon advertising a shipping date of 17 November. Atari is also releasing various other products, including additional CX40+ controllers (£19.99 each) and the games *Berzerk: Enhanced Edition* and *Mr Run And Jump* (£24.99 each). The *Atari 4 In 1 Game Cartridge Plus Paddle Pack* (£29.99) features a set of two paddle controllers and a four-game cartridge comprising *Breakout*, *Canyon Bomber*, *Night Driver* and *Video Olympics*. All of these products are to be compatible with both the Atari 2600+ and original Atari 2600 hardware.

As for games, one of the most exciting ones is on our own front cover – *Star Wars: Dark Forces* is receiving a remaster via Nightdive Studios, with the classic first-person shooter set to benefit from a higher resolution and framerate, modern controller support and more. Nightdive also has a remaster of *Turok 3: Shadow Of Oblivion* on the way, completing the fondly remembered N64 trilogy. Both games will be coming to all modern platforms, with a release date for *Dark Forces* yet to be confirmed and *Turok* due to arrive in November.

» [NES] Tommy Pickles goes 8-bit. What's next, a Mega Drive game based on *Freakazoid*? [Yes please – Nick]

Fans of the point-and-click classic *Broken Sword* will be delighted to know that the original game is being remastered as *Broken Sword: Shadow Of The Templars Reforged*. Revolution Software is promising 4K visuals and enhanced audio, and a release

» [PC] The third chapter of the *Turok* saga is joining its predecessors in the modern age this November.

» [Switch] We won't lie, it's going to be hard to get used to a new voice for Mario.

» [PC] This café area will surely be familiar to long time fans of the *Broken Sword* series.

on PC, consoles and mobile in early 2024. Even more exciting is the announcement of *Broken Sword 6: Parzival's Stone*, the first new game in the series since the Kickstarter-funded episodic adventure *Broken Sword 5: The Serpent's Curse* almost a decade ago. Only a short video clip has been revealed, but George and Nico are back and it's set for a multiplatform release at a date yet to be determined.

The *Delta Force* series, currently celebrating its 25th anniversary, is being revived by TiMi Studio Group with *Delta Force: Hawk Ops* on PlayStation and Xbox consoles, PC and mobile. The large-scale multiplayer action of past games will return under a free-to-play model, while the single-player campaign will be based on the film *Black Hawk Down*. This first-person shooter is due to arrive in 2024.

» A fresh set of jitter-free paddles sounds good, we hope the CX30+ ones fit the bill.

Even fans of VR games are getting some retro love. *The 7th Guest VR* brings back an icon of the early wave of CD-ROM games and gives players a chance to feel more immersed in the Stauf Mansion than ever before. The game received a release date of 19 October, when it will release on PlayStation VR 2, Meta Quest and PC. First-person shooter *Bulletstorm* is getting a third bite of the cherry in VR too, having been originally released in 2011 and remastered in 2017.

One of the most bizarre and unexpected announcements was that of *Rugrats: Adventures In Gameland* by The Mix Games and Wallride, which looks superficially similar to the *Bonk* games for the PC Engine. The cartoon tie-in is being released on modern consoles in 2024, with physical versions to be published by Limited Run Games, but the underlying design is for the NES – and the game will be released for that platform. This isn't unprecedented as the *Garbage Pail Kids* got a new NES game in 2022, but it is still surprising.

Nintendo also had a bombshell of its own. The rather promising 2D platformer *Super Mario Bros Wonder* will not feature the voice work of Charles Martinet, the man whose iconic portrayal of the plumber has been a constant for decades. Nintendo has indicated that the veteran voice actor will act as an ambassador for Mario in the future, but there's no word on who will replace him in the recording booth just yet. You won't have to wait long to find out, as the surreal-looking game is due for release on the Switch on 20 October.

As always, look for more coverage of the new games in the coming months, as well as a closer look at the Atari 2600+ in the very near future.

WIPEOUT EVERYWHERE

Fans have recently produced a pair of impressive ports of *WipEout*. *WipEout: Phantom Edition* is a new PC port based on the original PlayStation version that adds high-resolution support, an uncapped framerate, new collision options and more. Very soon after, Dominic Szablewski got the game up and running in web browsers complete with music and touch controls. Visit bit.ly/WOphantom for the *Phantom Edition* port, which you'll need a copy of the North American PlayStation version to use.

» [PC] Even the browser version of *WipEout* offers a higher resolution and smoother framerate than the original.

ZZAPPED TO THE PAST

Hundreds of Commodore fans visited the first ever Zzap! Live event in Kenilworth on 12 August. The event, hosted by Fusion Retro Events, offered plenty of games that were available to play on machines ranging from the PET and Commodore 64 to souped-up Amiga computers and even arcade cabinets. Other things attendees enjoyed on the day included Q&A sessions with special guests from developers such as Graftgold and Ocean, trading tables and an evening event featuring musical entertainment. For more information visit fusionretroevents.co.uk

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Konnichiwa

'm writing this a week after my return from Japan. I'm feeling flat and can't believe it's already so far behind me. I fell in love with the country in 2000 when I went there to interview some key players in the world of videogames for a TV documentary called *Thumb Candy*. I've been there a couple of times since and even got engaged there.

Eighteen months ago I gifted a trip to Japan to my two kids as Christmas presents. If I'm honest, I hadn't quite done the maths and was a little naïve on how much it would cost. Luckily (for me, not the residents of Japan) COVID had the whole place locked down until early 2023. This allowed me to save every single penny I could to make sure my kids had the best time ever.

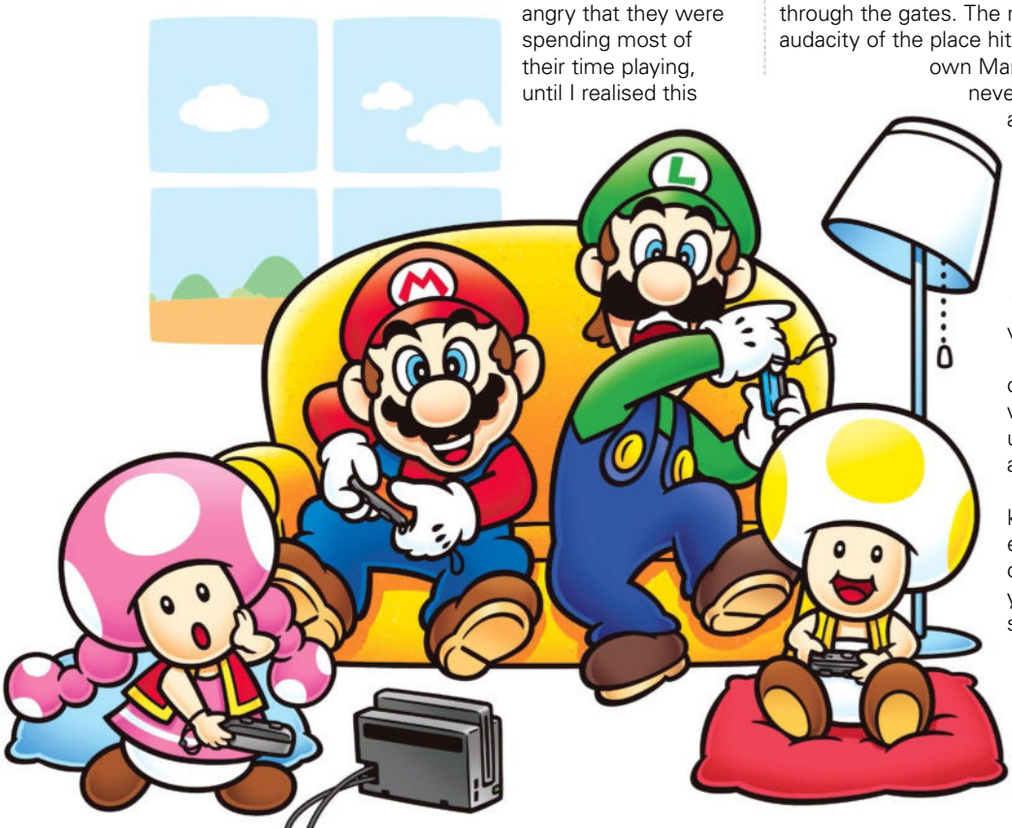
I was planning a big trip to Akihabara and retro shops like Super Potato. Well, if you want to make God laugh, make plans. We did get to Akihabara, but it was very late on our first night. We were too tired to do much except grab a McDonalds (very nice teriyaki burger) and play on some of the grabbing machines. Never mind.

The main thing that grabbed my lads in Japan was just how busy *Pokémon Go* was. At first, I was a little angry that they were spending most of their time playing, until I realised this was an amazing experience for them. Gyms full, battles overflowing with players. The squeals of joy from them was life affirming. I do wonder why Tokyo needs at least four *Pokémon* stores… but there you go.

> "Nothing can prepare you for the majesty as you walk through the gates"

The last three days of the holiday were spent at Universal Studios. I am not a roller-coaster fan so I was very happy to grab a coffee while K and A went off and rode the Flying Dinosaur and HollywoodDreams. Nah mate, not for me. The highlight of USJ (apart from Jaws, that was amazing) was Super Nintendo World. This is a real pain to get into. You have to buy a fast track that has Nintendo World as part of it, otherwise you have to enter a lottery. You will be pleased to hear that dad managed to get us in.

Nothing can prepare you for the majesty as you walk through the gates. The noise, the colour, the sheer audacity of the place hits you in the gut like a… put your own Mario metaphor in here… and you never fully recover. We had wristbands and what fun it was to run around smacking blocks to get points. I say running… it was 39 degrees in new money (102.2 F for people my age) and there was very little shelter. But who cares about sunburn and sunstroke? Turns out I should have as I wasn't very well that evening!



We also got to meet some real-life celebrities. All three of us squealed when Mario and Luigi walked past us and we were lucky enough to get a selfie with Princess Peach.

Sharing those two weeks with my kids is in my top three life experiences. I'm now in that horrific comedown after an amazing holiday, years in the making. No, I don't have something in my eye, YOU DO.

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:
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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Fun with Kirby

've been on a bit of a *Kirby* kick of late. I've always had a bit of a moist spot for the pink, spherical, whatever-it-is, and his impressive set of lungs. In terms of core gameplay mechanics, I always felt the franchise deserved more credit than it seems to have received. I've never really understood why *Kirby* – though wildly successful by the metric of most game series – was always relegated to Nintendo's second-tier brands.

Perhaps the games have always been too easy, and are often dismissed as being aimed at the less-mature end of the market? Perhaps it's too cute, too pink, too cuddly…? Certainly, I don't remember ever really being challenged by a *Kirby* game, but that never stopped me enjoying them. It was the playing that I liked – not the beating.

The reason for choosing to squish my head so deeply inside Kirby's lipless, salmon-hued maw was receiving *Kirby And The Forgotten Land* for my birthday this year, and enjoying it so much that I returned to some of the earlier games.

Forgotten Land is the 13th entry in the core *Kirby* series, but the first to be in full 3D. I mean, it's not quite go-anywhere 3D – it's still a pretty linear path through each of the levels – but it's the first time in the main series that a *Kirby* game hasn't been side-on. What struck me after playing *Forgotten Land*, and then returning to the earlier games, is how well Kirby's iconic inhalation ability translates to 3D.

I may be in the minority here, but I've always felt that most of the iconic 2D platformer franchises have never really recovered from their leap into three dimensions. Or, at least, they've never entirely managed to hold onto the elements that made them classics in the first place.

Some series literally never recovered – giving major side-eye to *Earthworm Jim* here. Others stuck doggedly with the 3D thing – *Sonic*, *Mario* – before subtly reintroducing side-on elements (for me, *Mario Odyssey* never feels more '*Mario*' than those 2D bits), or just releasing brand-new 2D games. *Sonic Mania* remains the best *Sonic The Hedgehog* game since *Sonic 2*, and I'll roll over anybody who argues otherwise.

Again, at the risk of being made to sit in the corner and face the wall, much as I enjoy Mario's 3D adventures, they feel like something wholly different to the classic run of *Super Mario Bros*/*Super Mario Bros 3*/*Super Mario World*. Yes, all the iconography translates well enough, and they're enjoyable games in their own right, but for me they felt more like a parallel to the main *Mario* franchise, which is a strictly 2D experience. I look forward more to a new 2D *Mario* game than I do one of the supposedly blockbuster 3D releases.

It's why I was so pleasantly surprised by *Kirby And The Forgotten Land*. It doesn't feel like an aside, or a whole different series. It feels like *Kirby*, which is testament to the simplicity and genius of those original games. ✱

> "I've always had a bit of a moist spot for the pink, spherical, whatever-it-is, and his impressive set of lungs"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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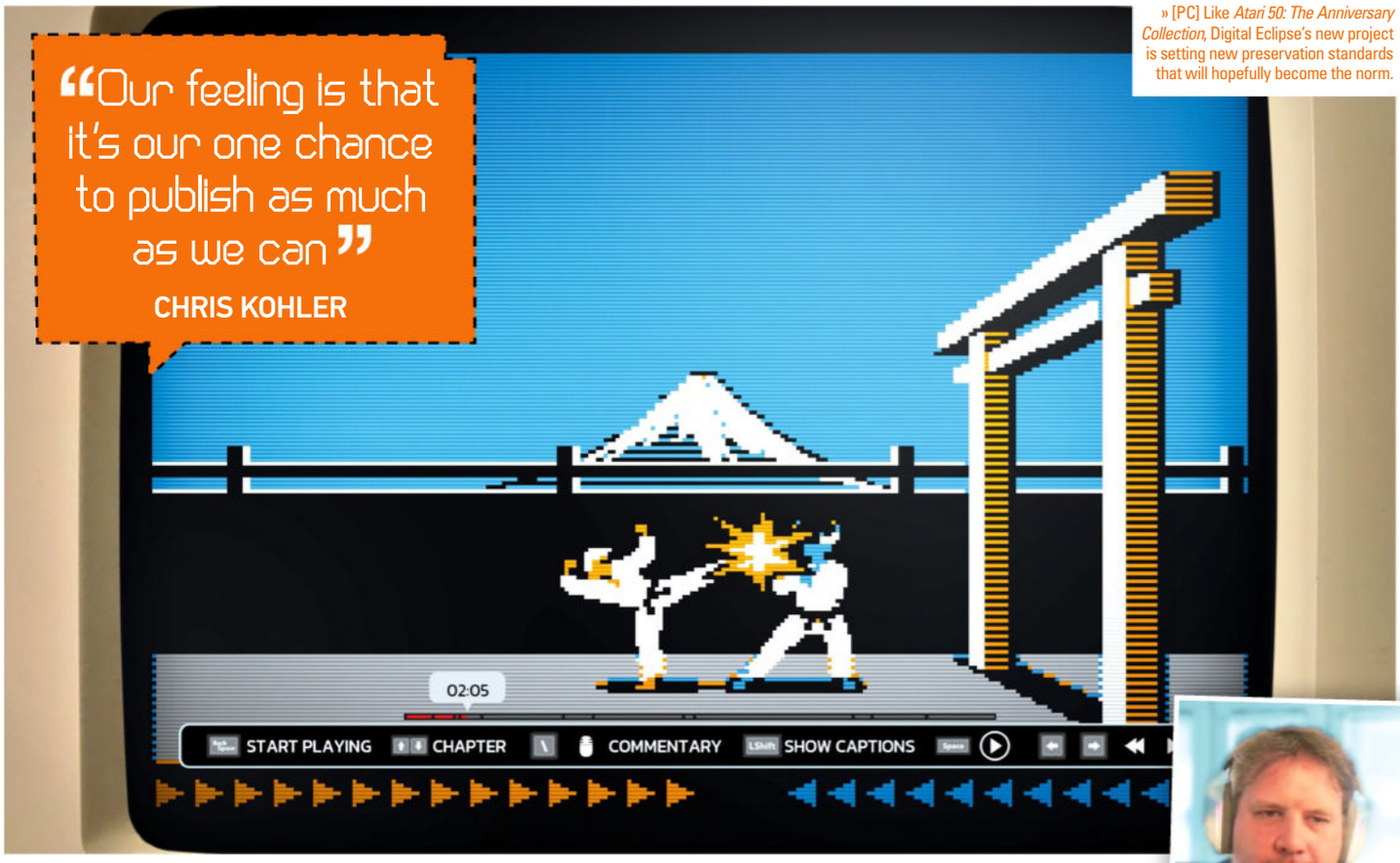
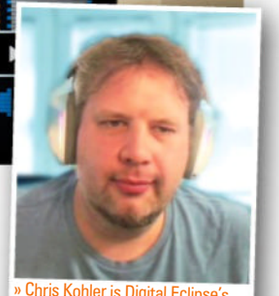


» [PC] Like *Atari 50: The Anniversary Collection*, Digital Eclipse's new project is setting new preservation standards that will hopefully become the norm.

The Making Of Karateka

Game preservation has just gone up a level



» Chris Kohler is Digital Eclipse's editorial director and rightly calls *Karateka* a "landmark game".

Digital Eclipse, the Californian developer specialising in videogame preservation, has created a kick-ass interactive documentary about Jordan Mechner's groundbreaking martial-arts action title *Karateka*. It covers Mechner's life and loves, discusses pioneering techniques such as rotoscoping and features design documents, journal entries and videos along with playable prototypes and new remastered versions of *Karateka* and the unreleased *Deathbounce* too. We caught up with editorial director Chris Kohler to learn more.

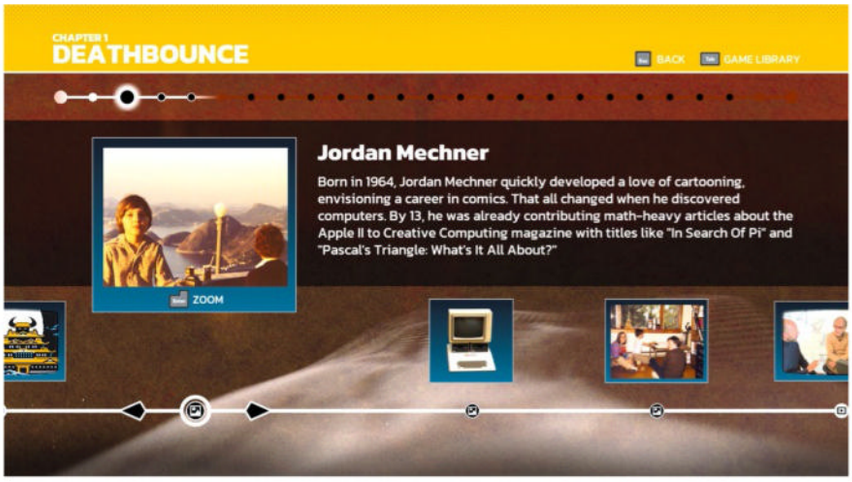
Why did you choose to make an interactive documentary about *Karateka*?
Our studio president Mike Mika and head of business development Tom Russo are huge *Karateka* fans. After reviving the Digital Eclipse brand in 2015, they went to Jordan proposing we do a special re-release of the game incorporating his development materials – a proof of concept for creating a high-end release of a classic game. Over years of development, *The Making Of Karateka* evolved into a full, interactive documentary telling the story of the game's development through video, audio, playable experiences, archival materials and more, arranged in a chronological narrative structure.

What made *Karateka* special?
It was a landmark game that doesn't get its historical due. As Jordan Mechner's directorial debut, it innovated on several levels – music, cinematic camera work, cutscenes, rotoscoped animation and storytelling. It's no overstatement to say that it inspired a generation of game designers!

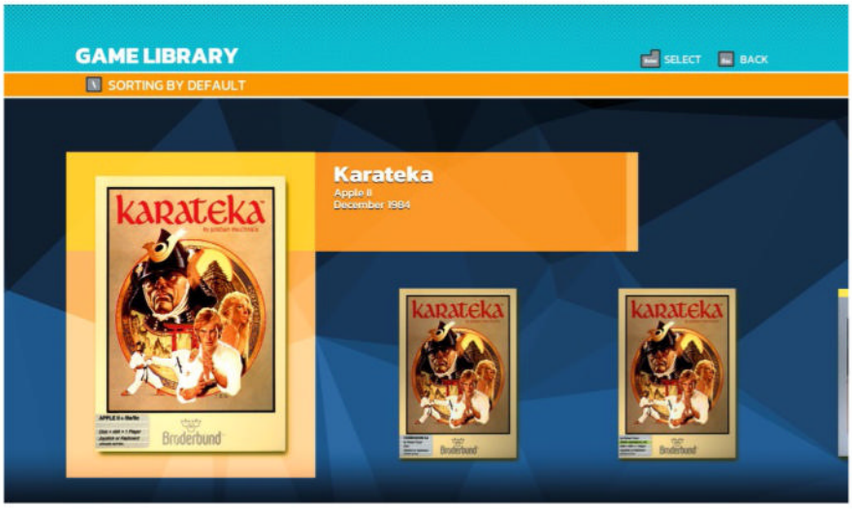
How did you plan the documentary's structure?
We did a great deal of research and asset collection then worked out how we'd structure the narrative. The sheer volume of material made it a challenge so we have timelines nested in timelines, galleries nested in those and so on. It's about taking an overwhelming amount of content and structuring it so the player never feels overwhelmed.

Did you have lots of material left over?
There's not a lot of cutting-room-floor material. With this and other projects, our feeling is that it's our one chance to publish as much as we can, and make our product a truly comprehensive archive.

There are many entries from Jordan's journals, is it unusual for game developers to keep such detailed notes?
It is definitely unusual for someone to document their creative process so thoroughly, yes! Having all of those notes was so helpful in so many ways – not only were they an incredible research tool that let us match the design documents and material from Jordan's floppy disks to specific calendar dates, but they provided an insight into Jordan's emotional state during development. It puts a human angle on the story that's often lost in these kinds of retellings.

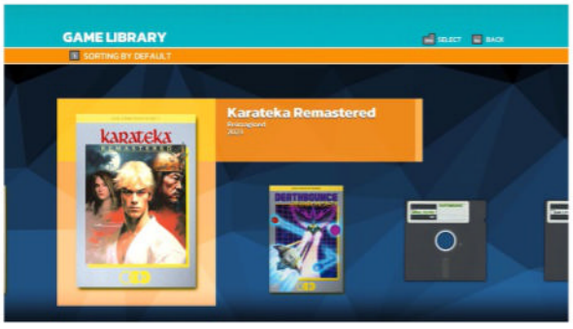

CHAPTER 1
DEATHBOUNCE
BACK
GAME LIBRARY
Jordan Mechner
Born in 1964, Jordan Mechner quickly developed a love of cartooning, envisioning a career in comics. That all changed when he discovered computers. By 13, he was already contributing math-heavy articles about the Apple II to Creative Computing magazine with titles like "In Search Of Pi" and "Pascal's Triangle: What's It All About?"
ZOOM

» [PC] Chris says the idea was to allow people to gravitate towards certain items and spend more time in some areas than others.

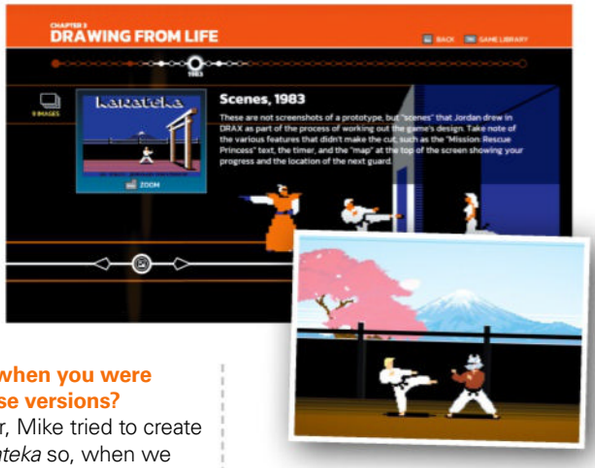


» [PC] The documentary allows gamers to play or watch the original releases via Steam, GOG.com, Epic Store, PS4, PS5, Xbox S/X, Nintendo Switch and Xbox One. It's a truly impressive achievement and is available to own right now.

» [PC] Users have the controller in their hands and can choose to go wherever they wish, Chris says.



» [PC] Gamers can also play remastered versions of *Karateka* and *Deathbounce*.


CHAPTER 3
DRAWING FROM LIFE
BACK
GAME LIBRARY
Scenes, 1983
These are not screenshots of a prototype, but "scenes" that Jordan drew in DRAX as part of the process of working out the game's design. Take note of the various features that didn't make the cut, such as the "Mission: Rescue Princess" text, the timer, and the "map" at the top of the screen showing your progress and the location of the next guard.
ZOOM

Being able to play games and prototypes takes the documentary to another level, did you worry they may have been so buggy that they'd be unplayable?

In most cases, the prototypes on display in *The Making Of Karateka* are submission candidates that Jordan put a significant level of polish on in the hopes of getting a publisher to pick them up. So when you play Jordan's first *Karateka* prototype, it's not an in-development build. If we wanted to feature a truly unplayable prototype that was prone to crashing, we might choose to show that in a video or screenshots.

A lot of thought has also gone into displaying the games – you can load and save progress, view controls, change the screen modes or just watch. What was your thinking behind all of this?

Since this is a documentary, we didn't want to force the player to be skilled at *Deathbounce* or *Karateka* to see everything, hence the inclusion of Watch Mode which lets anyone simply view a playthrough of the entire game. This also lets you use chapter-skipping to jump to any major section of the games. Let's say you just read about the bird, and you want to try to play that section to see what it's like. Easy!

The remastered games are amazing – faithful to Jordan's work but with updated audio and graphics. What were the most important things to consider when you were creating these versions?

As a teenager, Mike tried to create a port of *Karateka* so, when we signed *Karateka*, he wanted to do a port of the game for himself, to truly get the chance to dig into Jordan's source code, understand how the game worked, and produce a new version with graphical upgrades (roughly approximating a 486 PC) that retained the core of the original. It gave him the opportunity to incorporate various elements that we knew had been cut from the original, such as a scrolling tree and the 'big cat' enemy. Mike also wanted to make his remaster part of the documentary, so he added extensive commentary in which he discusses his interpretations of Jordan's original, and his struggles with replicating it.

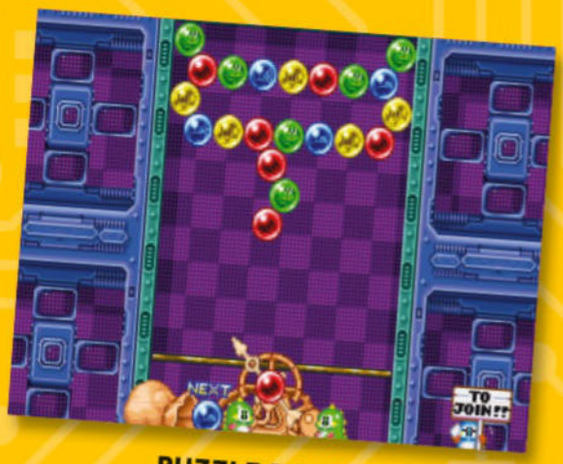
And why remaster *Deathbounce* too, a game that was part of Jordan's early story but never released?

I like to think I incepted the idea of doing a *Deathbounce* remaster into Mike's brain by saying, "We should do a *Deathbounce* remaster, ha ha, just kidding, unless?" Then one day I found out Mike had actually assigned this to our then-new engineers Jeremy Williams and Dave Rees as a way of getting them acquainted with our internal Eclipse Engine. I think it was supposed to be a training exercise, but they knocked it so far out of the park, it accidentally became one of the package's highlights.

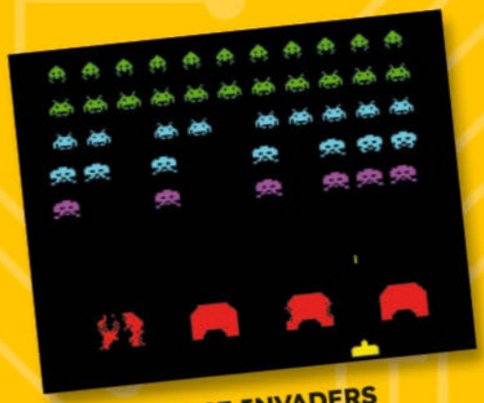
From the Creators of EVERCADE®

HYPER MEGA TECH!

SUPER POCKET



PUZZLE BOBBLE

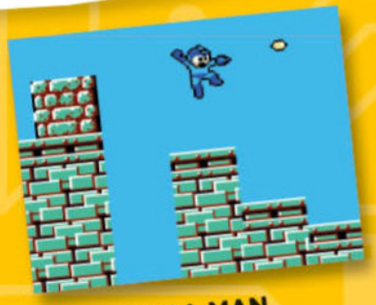


SPACE INVADERS

RASTAN

ARCADE IN YOUR POCKET!

1942



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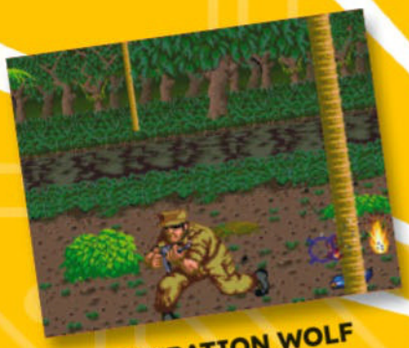
18 TAITO ARCADE* GAMES

BUBBLE BOBBLE



OPERATION WOLF

12 CAPCOM ARCADE* GAMES

STREET FIGHTER 2: HYPER FIGHTING

STRIDER

WATCH THE SUPER POCKET TRAILER

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

FEBRUARY 2007 – It's time to get muddy as the PS3 and Wii have duelling off-road racers, while PS2 owners get to enjoy some down-and-dirty brawling with Clover Studio's final game. As always, Nick Thorpe is your guide to all of yesterday's hottest gaming news

» [PS3] Dashing through the dirt had rarely been as thrilling as it was in *MotorStorm*.

NEWS FEBRUARY 2007

On 4 February, the Indianapolis Colts won Super Bowl XLI, defeating the Chicago Bears 29-17 to claim their first Super Bowl victory since 1971. Quarterback Peyton Manning was named MVP for the game, with 25 of 38 pass attempts completed for a total of 247 yards, with just one interception. The Colts' Dominic Rhodes was also a key player, achieving 113 rushing yards.

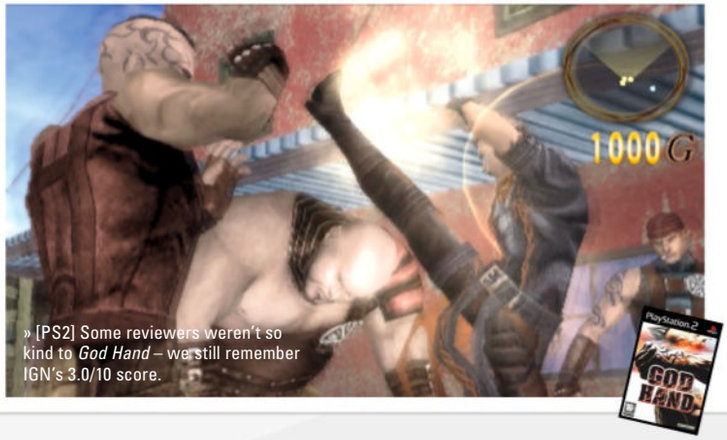
Anna Nicole Smith passed away on 8 February, at the age of 39. The model and actress was found dead at a hotel in Florida, having accidentally overdosed on a variety of prescription drugs. She was best-known for her work in Playboy and roles in movies such as *The Naked Gun 33 1/3*, as well as her controversial marriage to octogenarian billionaire J Howard Marshall in the early Nineties.

On 19 February, 27-year-old former school caretaker Miles Cooper was arrested in connection with a letter bombing campaign that had begun in January and injured seven people. The bombs had been sent to organisations involved with DNA testing and road transport. Cooper was convicted at trial and given an indeterminate sentence, with a minimum of four years and 149 days to be served before being eligible for parole.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM FEBRUARY 2007

With the excitement of Christmas long past and the new consoles all out – unless you were still hanging on for the PS3's European launch – February was a rather light month for gaming thrills. The game that attracted the most interest was Sony's flagship racing game *MotorStorm*, in its Japanese import form. In an 8/10 review, *games™* felt that it was "unforgivable" that the game had launched without Time Trial, Arcade and Multiplayer modes, but that it was still "the finest arcade racer since *Burnout Revenge*". *Next3* also awarded it 8/10, saying that it "may be the best-looking videogame in history" and *Play* gave it 82%, praising it for having "a sense of chaos unmatched by any of its contemporaries".

If you were still enjoying the older vintage of PlayStation, Capcom's brawler *God Hand* was the game to see. "It's the gaming equivalent of a John Waters film, in that it's pretty camp in places and not as funny as you think it will be," said our Tim, reviewing for *Play*. "But for the sheer awesomeness of the fighting, the variety of attacks and characters to beat off you really have to admire *God Hand*," he concluded, giving a score of 89%. *PlayStation: Official Magazine* gave the "gloriously unhinged" game 8/10, and *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* gave it 7/10, feeling that it was "rough around the edges". For *games™*, the feeling that "it's simply not going to appeal to most gamers in this territory" was enough to knock the "entertaining and challenging" game down to 6/10.



» [PS2] Some reviewers weren't so kind to *God Hand* – we still remember IGN's 3.0/10 score.

The PS2 actually got two worthwhile games this month, with RPG *Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga 2* being the other. *Play* gave it 82%, feeling that it was "far too unrelenting" for new players but was otherwise "an impressive RPG that keeps the old-school mentality alive". *Official PS2* gave it 7/10, calling it "artistically accomplished" but criticising the "relentless fighting and steep learning curve". Two

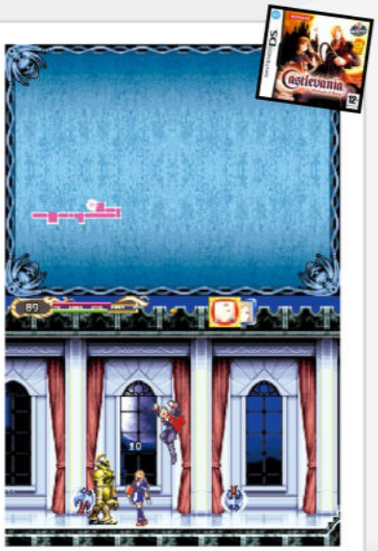
good games is more than PSP owners got, as the best game of the month was *Rocky Balboa*, a slightly updated port of *Rocky Legends* that earned 6/10 from *Official PS2*. The Xbox 360 crowd also had little to cheer. *Dead Or Alive Xtreme 2* was the only major release of the month, with the minigame laden spin-off earning 5/10 from *Edge* and 4/10 from *Official Xbox 360 Magazine*.

Over on the Wii, the rough and ready off-road racer *Excite Truck* got 84% from *Official Nintendo Magazine*, which felt it to be "one of the most thrilling and adrenaline-charged racers we've ever played", albeit one with a "short list of options". Despite feeling that it was "surprisingly good fun to play", *games™* decided that "there's just not enough here to warrant the premium price" and gave it 6/10. Hudson Soft's marble-rolling maze game *Kororinpa* also received a moderately warm welcome, earning 7/10 from both *Edge* and *games™*, and 7.2/10 from *nRevolution* which admired the Wii Remote's ability to "re-energise even the most basic of game concepts".

Castlevania: Portrait Of Ruin was another elaboration of the *Symphony Of The Night* template, and the main attraction for DS owners this month. In an 8/10 review, *games™* declared it "the best *Castlevania* in an age" thanks to the new dual character system and the removal of *Dawn Of Sorrow*'s stylus rune casting. *Official Nintendo* also felt that the new mechanic "adds a new level of tactical thinking" and gave the game 90%, while *nRevolution* felt it to be "immensely playable" but criticised the portrait levels for being "incredibly linear in their design", scoring the game 8.7/10.

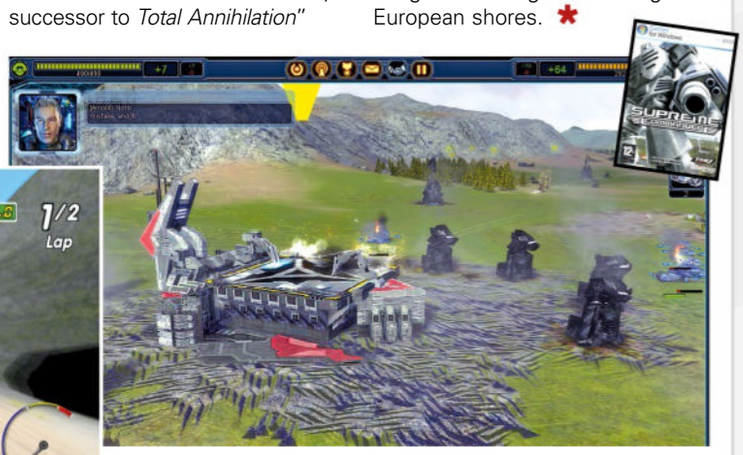
Strategy gamers were well served on the PC this month, with *Supreme Commander* impressing *PC Gamer* despite the game's heavy hardware demands. The reviewer said, "I don't think I've played an RTS that's this demanding," noting that "you'll always face an intelligent, imaginative foe" and that battlefields were "far bigger than what you'd be used to playing in other strategy games". Overall, it was considered to be "a worthy successor to *Total Annihilation*" and earned a score of 90%. *PC Gamer* also enjoyed a range of belated console ports this month – *Test Drive Unlimited* scored 87%, *Rainbow Six Vegas* scored 86% and *Top Spin 2* scored 80%.

Join us again next month, when the PlayStation 3 finally brings the next generation fight to European shores. ✱



» [DS] Handheld *Castlevania* games had become very dependable by this point, as *Portrait Of Ruin* showed.

» [Wii] We'll best honest, 6/10 for *Excite Truck* feels like a raw deal given *MotorStorm*'s scores.



» [PC] Unlike prior PC games, *Supreme Commander* was hungry for CPU cores rather than raw clock speed.

CHARTS

FEBRUARY 2007

XBOX 360

1 – **Gears Of War** (Microsoft)
2 – **Rainbow Six Vegas** (Ubisoft)
3 – **Call Of Duty 3** (Activision)
4 – **Pro Evolution Soccer 6** (Konami)
5 – **FIFA 07** (EA)

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – **FIFA 07** (EA)
2 – **Need For Speed: Carbon** (EA)
3 – **Pro Evolution Soccer 6** (Konami)
4 – **Buzz! Junior Jungle Party** (Sony)
5 – **The Sims 2: Pets** (EA)

PC

1 – **The Sims 2: Pets** (EA)
2 – **Football Manager 2007** (Sega)
3 – **FIFA 07** (EA)
4 – **Medieval II: Total War** (Sega)
5 – **The Sims 2** (EA)

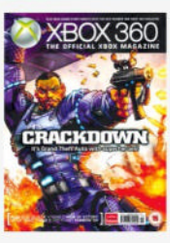
MUSIC

1 – **Grace Kelly** (Mika)
2 – **Ruby** (Kaiser Chiefs)
3 – **I Wanna Love You** (Akon ft. Snoop Dogg)
4 – **Starz In Their Eyes** (Just Jack)
5 – **This Ain't A Scene, It's An Arms Race** (Fall Out Boy)

THIS MONTH IN...

Play

"This game will kill off all hope of there being another decent *Sonic* outing ever again," says a 52% review of *Sonic The Hedgehog* for PS3. There was, but it took until 2011's *Sonic Generations* to get there.

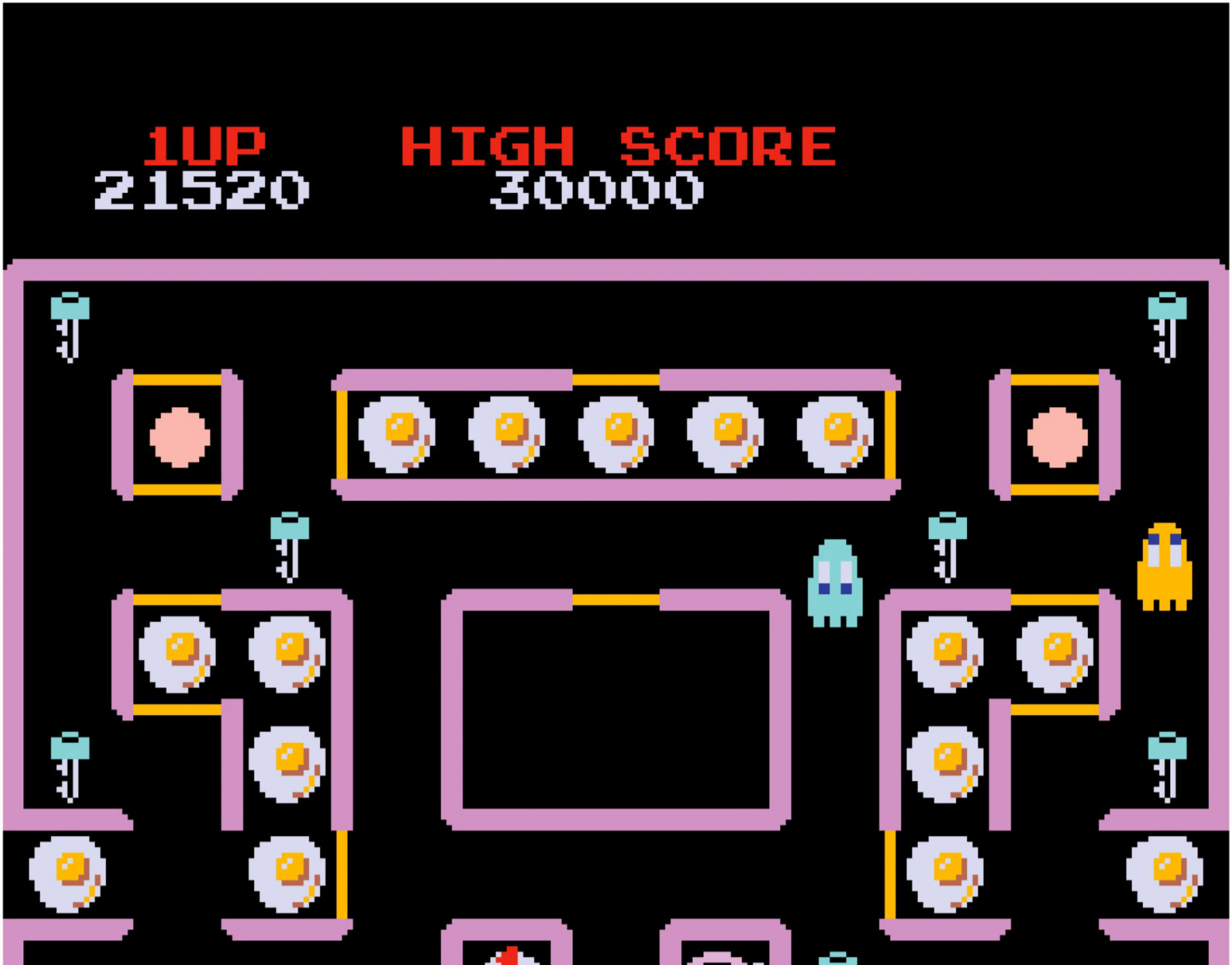


Official Xbox 360 Magazine

"Finally! The sequel we've been waiting four years for has… oh. Wait a minute." Yes, *Shenmue* has come to Xbox 360 – but it's the second game via backwards compatibility, rather than the elusive third.

Edge

"I hope they continue to make good games, because they're an inspiration to many of us in the business," says Sony's Phil Harrison of Microsoft-owned Rare. "I'm sure they'll get their groove back." [Did he not play *Viva Piñata*? - Ed]


1UP
21520
HIGH SCORE
30000

Super Pac-Man

WHY USE KEYS WHEN YOU HAVE A MOUTH?

» ARCADE » 1982 » NAMCO

A smash-hit game can be a blessing and a curse for a developer. The money and the fame that it brings is usually welcome, and any follow-up will have a guaranteed audience – but creating that follow-up can be a tricky endeavour. A developer first has to understand *why* the game was such a success, and then find a way to change the formula enough to make something fresh without removing the initial appeal. Namco managed to do that for *Galaxian* with *Galaga*, but *Super Pac-Man* is a great example of what happens when the appeal of the original game is misunderstood.

To give Namco credit, it did recognise that the characters were beloved and didn't mess around with them. But *Pac-Man* is a very simple game, and *Super Pac-Man* ramps up the complexity. Your goal is to collect all of the fruit in the maze, but it's all stored in locked passages that must be opened with the keys located around the maze. There is another way in, though – you can munch on a green Super Pellet, which temporarily makes Pac-Man into a giant, invincible wall-chomping terror with a button-activated turbo speed. Power Pellets still make the ghosts blue and edible, for the customary bonus points. The doors and keys are the problem – as well as adding a secondary objective, the unlocking process often creates dead ends that make it far easier to get trapped.

Ironically, despite not being made by Namco, the subtle tweaks of *Ms Pac-Man* show much more understanding of the original game's key qualities than *Super Pac-Man* does. Toru Iwatani has reportedly said that he feels *Super Pac-Man* was boring, but Namco did try to further develop the formula with *Pac & Pal*, to little success. It wasn't until *Pac-Mania* that Namco finally revisited the basic *Pac-Man* template and in doing so, finally created a worthy successor – just seven years after the original game launched.

STAR WARS ULTIMATE GUIDE

DARK FORCES

WITH GEORGE LUCAS BUSY PLANNING THE NEXT STAGE OF HIS SCI-FI OPUS AND THE ALL-CONQUERING DOOM FRAGGING GAMERS EVERYWHERE, THE TIME WAS RIGHT FOR A FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER SET WITHIN THE STAR WARS UNIVERSE. WITH A NEW REMASTER RECENTLY ANNOUNCED BY NIGHTDIVE STUDIOS, THE TIME IS ALSO RIGHT TO RETURN TO LUCASARTS' ICONIC GAME

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

It's a long time ago: 1995. Plans are afoot to resurrect the *Star Wars* franchise in cinemas with the *Special Editions*, but it will be four years before fans can finally enjoy new material in the form of *Episode 1: The Phantom Menace*. Along with *Attack Of The Clones* and *The Revenge Of The Sith*, this was to be the start of *Star Wars*' much-maligned prequel trilogy; the pre-*New Hope* theme continued into the world of videogames as LucasArts released *Star Wars: Dark Forces* early in this year.

Dark Forces stars Kyle Katarn, an undercover rebel agent and ex-operative of the Imperial Special Operations Division. Driven by a hatred of the Rebel Alliance that supposedly killed his parents, Kyle plunges into the world of Imperial intelligence gathering and operations, slowly discovering the true nature of the Empire. Disillusioned, he realises it was not the Rebels behind his parents' deaths but the Empire itself, thanks to well-directed reports from a Rebellion undercover soldier, Jan Ors.

Then, disaster: the Empire captures Jan and tortures her as a spy. With her execution imminent, Kyle reveals his own colours, engineering Jan's escape from confinement and subsequent flight to a rebel base. Experienced in sabotage, combat and subterfuge, Kyle Katarn is now a vital, if slightly indifferent, cog in the Rebel Alliance. "The emotional manipulation he endured at the hands of the Empire has hardened him against causes," notes Jan Ors in the *Dark Forces* manual, "and made the idealistic, trusting young man into a deadly efficient saboteur whose loyalty must be earned rather than bought."

Dark Forces begins, mercurially, by asking the player their name as they assume the role of Kyle Katarn. This screen is the tactical display, and from here, you can create a whole roster of agents, each diligently infiltrating the Empire in the name of the Rebel Alliance. On the right side of this screen is the mission list. When Kyle completes a quest, it appears here, and he can replay each one at will. The ▶

» [PC] Kyle has access to a variety of weapons, and they all feel satisfying to use.

"THERE WAS NOTHING QUITE LIKE IT TECHNICALLY – I RECALL THE SENSE OF BEING IMMERSED IN THAT WORLD"
LARRY KUPERMAN

» [PC] Secret Base, *Dark Forces*' opening level, features plenty of Imperials to gun down, as well as some precious plans to retrieve.

» [PC] Another Nineties FPS stalwart – conveyor belts.

» [PC] Q manipulates Captain Picard to turn his gun on William Riker. Q is very naughty.

"I WANTED TO DO A STAR WARS VERSION OF A 3D SHOOTER LIKE WOLFENSTEIN – DOOM HADN'T BEEN RELEASED AT THIS POINT"
DARON STINNETT

Special thanks to our interviewees. Restoration work of original *Dark Forces* art by Jan Hofmeister.

I FIND YOUR LACK OF TRIVIA DISTURBING

ESSENTIAL DARK FORCES FACTS

- *Dark Forces*' PC cheat modes are an homage to *Doom*'s. Each has the initials 'LA' (for LucasArts) preceding the code; all of *Doom*'s codes began with 'ID'.
- Kyle Katarn's blaster, the Bryar Pistol, makes its debut in *Dark Forces*. It inspired Cassian Andor's gun in the recent Disney *Star Wars* series, *Andor*.
- *Dark Forces*' Dark Troopers also appear in a Disney series, *The Mandalorian*, and in Dark Horse Comics' *Dark Empire* comic books. That's a lot of darkness.
- Clint Bajakian created *Dark Forces*' superb music and sound effects.
- The canonisation/non-canonisation of Kyle Katarn is a constant debate among fans. Initially, *Dark Forces* was developed outside the main *Star Wars* world before being assumed in, discarded by Disney, and then re-introduced (for some fans) after his inclusion in the *Star Wars Trading Card Game*.
- There are a handful of familiar locations from the movies, such as the industrial planet, Coruscant and a Star Destroyer.
- Kyle Katarn faces off only once against the Phase III Dark Trooper. Rom Mohc wears it in the game's finale.
- LucasArts' demo of *Dark Forces* (the first level, Secret Base) contains a brief scene of Kyle Katarn preparing his weapons. It was removed from the final game.
- In 1998, Kenner/Hasbro produced a Kyle Katarn action figure as part of its *Expanded Universe* range.
- The actor behind Kyle Katarn is the hard-working Nick Jameson, who also voiced Max in *Sam & Max Hit The Road*, among others.
- *Dark Forces* lifts some of its cutscenes from the *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* games.

» [PC] A Phase II Dark Trooper stalks Kyle Katarn.

The Death Star Plans are locked away at an Imperial Secret Base on the planet Danuta, where they await transport to Lord Vader. Very little is known about the layout of the base itself, so I'm afraid you will have to act as your own reconnaissance.
EASY
MED
HARD
CANCEL
OK

» [PC] Kyle's first mission is to steal the plans for the Empire's new battlestation.

▶ game thrusts the player straight into one of the most decisive missions in *Star Wars* history: locate and pilfer the plans to a moon-shaped space station capable of destroying whole planets with its powerful laser weapon. Kyle Katarn proves his mettle by swiping the Death Star blueprints while simultaneously condemning himself to be excised from official *Star Wars* canon upon the release of *Rogue One* in 2016.

***Star Wars: Dark Forces* uses a bespoke engine that LucasArts' in-house team developed.** The result is a game that takes the template established by the classic *Doom* and improves various aspects. Unlike the anonymous Marine of id's game, Kyle Katarn can jump, crouch and look up and down. *Dark Forces*' advanced map also includes rooms-over-rooms and the occasional appearance of genuine 3D models alongside the then-common flat sprites. With the electronic rendition of the famous *Star Wars* music and an accurate portrayal of many enemies from the series, the result is a deeply involving adventure, a far cry from the Nintendo *Star Wars* platform games of a few years earlier. Additionally, each mission has a carefully devised structure and the whole game a consistent plot, driving Kyle and Jan across the galaxy.

> "WE REALISED WE NEEDED A FRESH CHARACTER SO WE COULD WRITE HIS STORY TO WRAP AROUND THE GAME"
> **DARON STINNETT**

In *Dark Forces*, each mission begins with Jan Ors dropping off Kyle Katarn at a designated area. Jan pilots The Moldy Crow, the beaten-up but trusty Corellian Engineering Corporation freighter assigned to the pair by the Rebel Alliance. After the success of the initial mission, *Dark Forces* recaps the events of *A New Hope* before Kyle is sent to the planet Talay to investigate a recent Imperial massacre. Dead and burned bodies litter the city of Tak, and the smoking remains evoke the demise of Luke Skywalker's Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru in *A New Hope*. Kyle fights to the Rebel base and discovers a massive Imperial Repeater Rifle, a weapon that's patently too large for a normal-sized human to wield. This gun is the evidence that proves the existence, or at least the development, of the Empire's Dark Trooper project. Throughout *Dark Forces*, Kyle Katarn, aided by Jan Ors, travels across space to discover more evidence of the Empire's nefarious plans to create an army of super-robots.

While his Force abilities and lightsaber skills might be some way off, Kyle Katarn is not defenceless against this assault of merciless Imperial aggression. The player begins with a modified version of the distinctly uncivilised K-16 Bryar Laser Pistol, a reliable yet slow weapon with high accuracy. Soon, Kyle will have his hands on a Stormtrooper E-11 Laser Rifle, an inelegant but effective rapid-fire gun that consumes ammo at a high rate. These are the primary armaments of the game, and as the player delves further into the world of *Dark Forces*, more weapons become available. Grenades are (inevitably) characterised by Thermal ▶

» [PC] The Dark Troopers prepare to descend on Tak.

» [PC] A disappointed Vader surveys the destruction of the Arc Hammer – Force Choke on standby.

DIRECTING DARK FORCES

DARON STINNETT, PROJECT LEADER ONE OF DARK FORCES, TAKES US THROUGH THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIRST STAR WARS FPS

HOW DID YOU START WORK AT LUCASARTS?
I was working at Spectrum Holobyte, running the Falcon project. A friend had left Spectrum and joined LucasArts and asked me to join him. I met them, and they said come on over, and you get to pick the project you want to build. That's when the *Dark Forces* project began.

WHAT WERE THE GAMING INFLUENCES BEHIND *DARK FORCES*?
I wanted to do a *Star Wars* version of a 3D shooter like *Wolfenstein – Doom* hadn't been released at this point. But it also went back to Spectrum Holobyte. We had a cockpit there with all the controls and a stereo system, and before I left, *X-Wing* came out. We immediately loaded it up into the cockpit, and that was where it really became exciting. Computers at the time couldn't do a very good job of rendering landscapes, but they could do space pretty well because the landscape was stars. The immersion of it being *Star Wars* and flying an X-Wing in that cockpit greatly impacted me – that was the genesis of *Dark Forces*.

HOW DIFFICULT WAS IT TO DESIGN THE ENGINE FROM THE GROUND UP?
That was Ray Gresko, starting from scratch. 3D calculations were well-known and understood – the question was how to do it in real-time, given the hardware we had at the time. The other big challenge was no one at LucasArts had 3D design experience. Fortunately, while at a film screening at Skywalker Ranch, someone mentioned they knew the head of architecture at UC Berkeley. Two of their students left their program and joined LucasArts as 3D world designers.

WHY DID YOU DECIDED TO USE A NEW PLAYER CHARACTER, KYLE KATARN?
We originally considered using Luke Skywalker, but then we realised it would lock us into his story, which was ultimately constructed for a movie. We realised we needed a fresh character so we could write his story to wrap around the game that we knew we could build. It was always understood that what we were doing was outside the official canon, which was better as we weren't restricted by what we could do.

WAS MULTIPLAYER EVER CONSIDERED?
We were pushing hard to get the game finished and launched. I remember the head of the studio asking me if we needed more time, which was crazy – game studios never asked you if you wanted more time! But we were ready to go, and while I think multiplayer would have been a great addition, it's not easy to just add as a layer on top – you had to think about it from the start [of development]. My concern was that by the time we went in and retrofitted multiplayer, it would put the schedule back, and we'd run the risk of other 3D shooters coming along with better rendering technology. And soon after, *Quake* came out with fully 3D graphics, and our tech would have looked poor.

ON THAT SUBJECT, THERE *ARE* SOME 3D MODELS IN *DARK FORCES*. HOW DID THEY END UP APPEARING IN THE GAME?
Our engine development actually began as fully 3D; we realised it wasn't going to work from a performance standpoint. From there, we created constraints to help optimise the rendering, like ensuring everything that was rendered was essentially vertical, all your edges and shapes just basically boxes. But it was still a 3D engine, and I believe we carefully picked some very empty spaces with limited sightlines to introduce these 3D robots. It was just to have something cool that people hadn't seen before.

DID YOU GET THE CHANCE TO SHOW *DARK FORCES* TO GEORGE LUCAS?
George had a party down at Disneyland to celebrate the opening of the *Indiana Jones* ride. I piggybacked on that, got some press for the game, and was showing George how to play it. He immediately started complaining about the violence, but it was done and going to market. Fortunately, it became the biggest seller for LucasArts at that point.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE DEVELOPING THE FIRST OFFICIAL *STAR WARS* GAME AT LUCASARTS?
There was this unwritten rule at LucasArts that we couldn't make *Star Wars* games. Everything had to be original stories and characters, and before *Dark Forces*, there had never been an internally developed *Star Wars* game. I remember tension from others, and maybe a little bit of frustration that we were able to go do it. But then, once *Dark Forces* was such a big success, the company was all in on doing *Star Wars*!

A NEW CAST

WHO'S WHO THAT'S NEW IN DARK FORCES

KYLE KATARN

■ Erstwhile Imperial special forces operative Kyle Katarn is the star of *Dark Forces*.

JAN ORS

■ Jan Ors is Katarn's Rebel liaison before becoming his partner throughout *Dark Forces*.

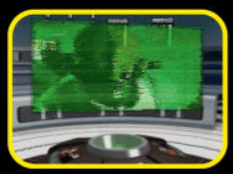
ROM MOHC

■ The general behind the Dark Trooper project, Rom Mohc battles Kyle in *Dark Forces*' conclusion.

MOFF REBUS

■ The oversized Imperial Repeater leads Kyle Katarn to paranoid weapon designer Moff Rebus.

ADMIRAL TOKA



■ Credited as 'Dying Rebel' in the game, Admiral Toka commanded Tak base before its destruction.

» [PC] Door locks and switches feature heavily in *Dark Forces*..

» [PC] *Dark Forces* encourages exploration – you might even find little treats such as this extra life.

THE BEST MISSIONS FROM DARK FORCES

RETRO GAMER'S FAVOURITE FIVE OF KYLE KATARN'S MISSIONS AGAINST THE EMPIRE

SECRET BASE

■ Kyle Katarn begins his saga with a pre-*New Hope* mission to steal the plans to the Empire's battle station, the Death Star. Numerous forces oppose him, but not as many as you'd expect in this gentle primer into the world of *Dark Forces*.

THE DETENTION CENTRE

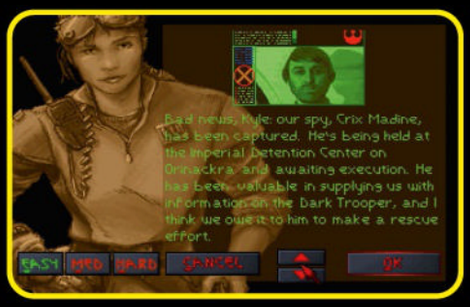
■ The Empire has captured the Rebels' inside man, Crix Madine, holding him at a Detention Centre on Orinackra as he awaits execution. Crix possesses valuable intel, giving Kyle no option but to attempt a daring rescue despite it not being quite what he had in mind.

NAR SHADDAA

■ The streets of Nar Shaddaa will have you consulting your map a lot, and you'll have a bunch of new enemies to combat in this mission. The Empire has put a bounty on Kyle's head, resulting in well-armed Gamorreans, Grans and Trandoshans joining the hunt for the Rebel spy.

JABBA'S REVENGE

■ Kyle's meddlings in the Dark Trooper project has unearthed a coalition between the Empire and the Hutts, with the latter supplying smuggling services to allow the project to go undetected. Captured by Jabba, Kyle faces off against a Kell Dragon at the start of this mission.


Bad news, Kyle: our spy, Crix Madine, has been captured. He's being held at the Imperial Detention Center on Orinacka, and awaiting execution. He has been valuable in supplying us with information on the Dark Trooper, and I think we owe it to him to make a rescue effort.
EASY
MED
HARD
CANCEL
OK

» [PC] Marching into the detention area is not what I had in mind!

» [PC] The robotic Phase I Dark Trooper.

» [PC] Imperial commandos regularly hunt Kyle Katarn.

▶ Detonators, and Kyle can also wield an Imperial Repeater Rifle – the standard size, presumably – a Fusion Cutter, Mortar Gun, and **Retro Gamer**'s particular favourite, the Stouker Concussion Rifle. Moreover, some weapons have an alternate fire: the Thermal Detonators set with a three-second delay (rather than explode on impact); the Imperial Repeater unleashes a trio of shots; while the Fusion Cutter disgorges all four of its barrels in a cone-shaped formation of fiery laser death. Each weapon is allocated a hot key (from one to zero), with the most basic – your fists – the only one that never runs out of ammunition.

The weapons of *Dark Forces* are fun, especially the movie-authentic E-11 Rifle; sadly, the enemy has them as well. Kyle Katarn is supposed to be a spy, so you'd be correct in assuming that *Dark Forces* involves sneaking around enemy bases or donning a Stormtrooper outfit (a la Luke Skywalker and Han Solo in *A New Hope*). Alas, the element of stealth hadn't quite infiltrated PC gaming at this point, leaving Kyle to go toe-to-toe with most of the Imperial forces. Unsurprisingly, Stormtroopers are the conventional opponent, and fortunately, their armour remains as wonky and paper-thin as in the movies. Skulking around glowing consoles and desks are the suited Imperial officers, often with their hands clenched behind their backs, patiently awaiting the completion of some dastardly plan. The other common enemy is the Imperial commando, their weird triangular helmets disguising an elite combat level and usually armed with Imperial Repeaters. Stinging Remotes, Viper Probe Droids (first memorably seen in *The Empire Strikes Back*) and jet-black IT-0 Interrogation Droids supplement the Empire's organic forces. Away from Imperials, *Dark Forces* features bounty hunters (most notably the three-eyed Grans and the reptilian Trandoshans), sewer-lurking Dianogas and Kell Dragons, the fearsome scaly pets of underworld boss Jabba The Hutt. Captured by Jabba outside Nar Shaddaa, Kyle faces off against Jabba's favourite Kell Dragon at the beginning of mission ten – with just his bare fists!

Finally, there are the Dark Troopers, and these robotic soldiers come in three flavours. The first is a skeletal prototype that wields a razor-sharp saw. In the mission to the Robotics Facility, Kyle encounters the second phase of Dark Trooper, still incomplete but now armed with a plasma-spitting Assault Cannon and jet pack. Kyle also has to combat the finished Trooper in the game's denouement, only more heavily armoured and with another attack consisting of yellowy fireballs.

Fortunately, Kyle Katarn is not defenceless against ▶

> "...ONCE DARK FORCES WAS SUCH A BIG SUCCESS, THE COMPANY WAS ALL IN ON DOING STAR WARS!"
> **DARON STINNETT**

ARC HAMMER

■ Kyle heads to the source of the Dark Trooper project, the spaceship Arc Hammer. The hero fends off attacks from Imperial troops and Dark Troopers while planting the charges to disable the massive ship and end the Empire's devious plans once and for all.

» [PC] Grab the plans and run for it!

Dark Forces EX 1.0.567 Gamescom Demo - Work-In-Progress
'Kyle Katarn finds himself outnumbered 3 to 1 aboard the Imperial controlled fuel station, *Ergo*.'
1995-2023™ and © Lucasfilm Ltd.

» [PC] Nightdive has worked hard to ensure the remaster looks as authentic as possible.

Dark Forces EX 1.0.567 Gamescom Demo - Work-In-Progress
'Kyle Katarn, armed only with his fists, is forced to take on a Kell Dragon aboard the *Star Jewel*.'
1995-2023™ and © Lucasfilm Ltd.

» [PC] Don't expect new weapons, levels or monsters in Nightdive's remaster. Do expect fist fights with Kell Dragons.

REFINING DARK FORCES

RETRO GAMER CHATS TO NIGHTDIVE'S LARRY KUPERMAN AND MAX WAINE ABOUT THE STUDIO'S DARK FORCES REMASTER

"The original game [*Dark Forces*] was one that I played when it first came out," remembers Larry Kuperman, director of business development at Nightdive Studios. "I was not playing it with my dad, but with my son, which was kind of the opposite end of the spectrum. It was the first game that really thrust me into the world of *Star Wars*. I really felt like I was part of that." Larry also recalls the many technological advantages that LucasArts' game made over its competitors. "There was nothing quite like it technically – I recall the sense of being immersed in that world," he says. Committed to creating updates of classic retro games, Nightdive had already successfully updated Nineties games such as *Quake II*, *Blood* and *System Shock*; now its attention has turned to the LucasArts best-seller that helped propel *Star Wars* games to the masses. "[*Dark Forces*] was on our list as being a legendary game and deserved of remastering and brought to a new audience," Larry continues.

While Larry fondly looks back at *Dark Forces*, project lead Max Waine has a different perspective on the acclaimed game. "I was not born when *Dark Forces* first came out," he explains. "It's very interesting coming to the game [now]. Of course, I'm a big fan of the classic *Doom* games and I feel *Dark Forces* offers something very unique compared to those games." Despite coming to the game very late, Max clearly understands what makes *Dark Forces* so special. "I've come to have a great appreciation of the game having worked on it. It's a small technical marvel, what they managed to do at the time," he says. "It's a lot more of an immersive experience, I think. It really does feel like you're in different locations of the *Star Wars* universe."

Nightdive is promising a remaster of *Dark Forces* that, while bringing some aspects into the 21st century, retains the original's exact level layout and spirit. "It's really important to us that we remain faithful," says Larry, "In terms of changing the basics of the game, we stay away from that. We want people to enjoy the game as it was, under modern conditions." To satisfy the contemporary gamer, Nightdive is focussing on giving *Dark Forces* the 4K and widescreen treatment and refining its controls. "You don't paint a moustache on the Mona Lisa," grins Larry. "The game was complete and important as is."

Also included in the remaster will be newly rendered cutscenes. "The cutscenes have been re-rendered. They are faithful, they are a one-to-one duplicate of the original cutscene, but in higher resolution," continues Larry. "Alongside the newly rendered cutscenes drawn by our artists and rendered by our artists, we have, as an option, the originals for people who want to stick with those," adds Max.

Work on the remaster is progressing well, and Max is particularly impressed with how much of the original game had been archived. "We were fortunate enough that Disney and LucasArts of the time in the Nineties were very good at backing up their data, which meant we were able to start off with the source code, which isn't always the case," he says. "That means we didn't have to do any reverse engineering."

Nightdive did need some help though, particularly for the game's music. "We reached out to the key developer of a reverse-engineered source port [called] LuciusDXL, [their] source port is called the Force Engine," continues Max. "We reached out to them and we were able to use their code for the iMuse system that was LucasArts' music and sound system that they used in a bunch of games. That saved us a lot of effort." Larry also points out that there will be different music options available as well in the finished game. "We have a slightly enhanced version of [the soundtrack] but if you're an originalist you can also go back to the original format and have a MIDI-sounding soundtrack."

The key question for fans is whether *Dark Forces* could be the first in a line of *Star Wars* remasters. "We view this as our first effort, our opportunity to prove ourselves to the team at Disney/Lucasfilm," admits Larry. "There's a treasure trove of great content here, and given Nightdive's mission to bring back all the lost classics, we're hoping it's going to be a relationship that bears fruit in the future." Expect *Star Wars: Dark Forces Remaster* in early 2024 on PlayStation, Xbox, PC and Nintendo Switch. "Our concern is not timing," says Larry when the talk turned to a potential slip from late-2023, "our concern is to ship the best possible port of the game we can." Needless to say, you can expect a review in **Retro Gamer** when *Star Wars: Dark Forces Remastered* is eventually released.

WE'RE DOOMED

HOW DARK FORCES TOOK ON ID SOFTWARE'S GAME AND WON

ROOMS OVER ROOMS

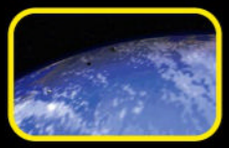
■ While *Doom* had multiple floors, they were never directly over another room.

JUMP (AND CROUCH) FOR JOY

■ Kyle Katarn is an agile fellow, able to duck and jump around each environment.

DO LOOK UP

■ *Dark Forces* boasts freedom of vision, as well as movement. Great for sniping Stormtroopers.



AN ONGOING MISSION

■ All of *Dark Forces*' missions are linked with cutscenes as its story develops.

TRUE 3D

■ While much of the game is in 2.5D, some genuine 3D models are on show in *Dark Forces*.

ANIMATED EFFECTS

■ *Dark Forces* boasts some pioneering animated effects, such as this Death Star.

"OUR CONCERN IS NOT TIMING. OUR CONCERN IS TO SHIP THE BEST POSSIBLE PORT OF THE GAME WE CAN"
LARRY KUPERMAN

» [PC] If you're not keen on the new cutscenes Nightdive has created, there is an option to watch the originals.

Dark Forces EX 1.0.567 Gamescom Demo - Work-In-Progress
'Kyle Katarn encounters a Trandoshan warrior aboard the Imperial fuel station, Ergo.'
1995-2023 ™ and © Lucasfilm Ltd.

» [PC] There's a possibility the remaster will arrive late-2023, but early 2024 is looking more likely.

▶ this onslaught of laser fire, missiles and razor-sharp teeth. The rebel spy has a health counter and a shield for repelling enemy laser fire; both are boosted using Med Kits and Shield Units, respectively. Other useful items include a headlamp, ice cleats and an air mask – all will come in handy on specific missions.

In the finest tradition of early first-person shooters, there are keys to collect, secrets to discover and four prized bonus power-ups: Shield Supercharge turns Kyle into an invincible warrior; Revive completely restores his health and shields to the max; Life gives him another spare life, while Weapon Supercharge doubles his rate of fire. Hunting out all these items and using them wisely is essential to defeating the Empire's plans. Kyle has a PDA at his disposal to assist him in organising his inventory, along with mission updates and a map. Puzzles are also notably more prominent than in *Dark Forces*' peers, and the player will need all their wits about them if they are to succeed.

***Star Wars: Dark Forces* was released in the early winter of 1995 to critical and commercial acclaim, despite inevitable comparisons to another certain FPS.** "It's easily the best first-person shooter since *Doom*," proclaimed *PC Gamer* magazine, "and a must for *Star Wars* fans everywhere." *Dark Forces*' outstanding success led to a PlayStation version, ported by Big Bang Software and released almost two years later to a little more muted reception.

Nevertheless, its astounding triumph led to change inside LucasArts: no longer would the studio prohibit itself from developing *Star Wars*-related games (LucasArts' fellow Californians, Totally Games, created the revered *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* space sims), leading to the staggering achievement of the *Jedi Knight* series, the first of which was subtitled *Dark Forces II*. With technology developing quickly, *Jedi Knight* retains Kyle Katarn, pitching the character against the evil Sith Lord, Jerec. In the process, Kyle discovers his Jedi roots and – finally! – is able to wield a lightsaber and use mystical Jedi powers against his enemies.

But that's a story for another time. From Imperial agent to mercenary and ultimately Rebel hero, the saga of Kyle Katarn begins in *Dark Forces*. Unfairly dismissed as a mere '*Doom* clone' upon release, the game marks the beginning of an incredible adventure for its star and LucasArts itself and it's not surprising that news of Nightdive's incoming remaster of the classic game sent a wave of excitement across the internet. Jyn Erso and Cassian Andor can do one; as far as **Retro Gamer** is concerned, it was the magnificent Kyle Katarn who purloined the Death Star plans, thus initiating the most famous sci-fi saga in the galaxy. ★

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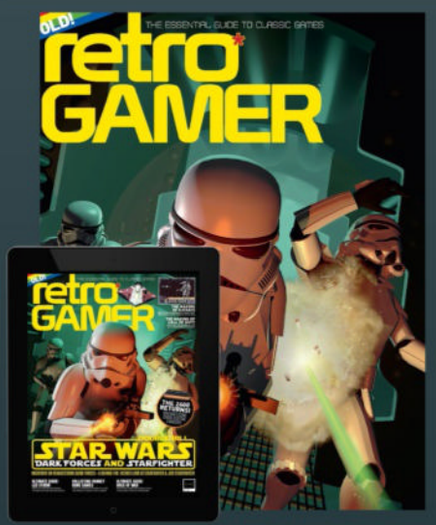

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THE MAKING OF

STAR WARS STARFIGHTER & JEDI STARFIGHTER

CREATED TO TIE-IN WITH THE STAR WARS PREQUEL TRILOGY, STARFIGHTER AND JEDI STARFIGHTER BROUGHT THE SPIRIT OF EPISODE I AND II TO THE PLAYSTATION 2. DESIGNER TIM LONGO EXPLAINS HOW LUCASARTS CHANNELLED THE MOVIES WITH ITS MISSION-BASED COMBAT FLIGHT SIMS

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

Many of the earliest *Star Wars* games put you in the pilot's seat of the spacecraft from the original movie trilogy, but the first of these that could be considered a combat flight sim was 1993's *Star Wars: X-Wing*, and it led to a long-running series. These popular titles were developed by Totally Games, but the opportunities presented by the second *Star Wars* trilogy persuaded its publisher LucasArts to create a combat flight sim of its own, as designer Tim Longo remembers. "The *Star Wars* prequel movies were coming out, and LucasArts wanted to do a PC-based flight sim in the style of *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter*," Tim notes. "Daron Stinnett, the project lead, was taking inspiration from hardcore flight sims like *Falcon 3.0*, but then the PlayStation 2 came out, and it did so well that LucasArts refocussed the project around it. On the mission side, we looked at *Wing Commander*, and the *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* games, but we found ways to simplify the missions to make them more console friendly."

Further inspiration came from LucasArts contemporary Factor 5, which started making its own *Star Wars* flight sim as Tim's team began making theirs, which they had named *Star Wars: Starfighter*. "*Rogue Squadron* was built in tandem with *Starfighter* by Factor 5," Tim explains. "So it definitely influenced us. But we were focussing more on the cockpit feel, so *Starfighter* was more first-person than third-person. We also tried to make some of our missions more open with more options, whereas *Rogue Squadron* was more about the big battles, so *Starfighter* was a bit more tactical."

The name *Starfighter* referred to the Naboo starships in 1999's *Star Wars: Episode I* movie, and these combat fighters informed the game's narrative and its missions. "Our focus was on the Naboo Starfighter ship, so we made the main character a pilot from Naboo," Tim points out. "Because the prequels were coming out, and they were focussed on the Starfighters, so for us it was clear to have at least some of the story focus on Naboo. So we took some classic scenes from the movie, like blowing up the control ship at the end. Because that was something you would see in the film that you would want to do in the game."

As well as a Naboo pilot – Rhys Dallows, *Starfighter* was given two other player characters in the form of merc Vana Sage and pirate Nym, plus NPC sidekick Reti. "We felt the concept of having three player characters really mirrored the whole franchise, ▶

» [PlayStation 2] The *Starfighter* character Nym flies a ship that fires highly effective laser bombs.

» [PC] The first incarnation of *Starfighter* was influenced by the hardcore flight sim *Falcon 3.0*.

» [PC] Once *Starfighter* became a PS2 title, its designers looked to the *X-Wing* games for inspiration.

» [PlayStation 2] Most of *Starfighter*'s missions are broadly shoot-'em-ups, but some require a degree of stealth.

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** LUCASARTS
- **DEVELOPER:** LUCASARTS
- **RELEASED:** 2001, 2002 (JEDI STARFIGHTER)
- **PLATFORM:** PS2, PC, XBOX
- **GENRE:** COMBAT FLIGHT SIM

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 2005

LARA CROFT: TOMB RAIDER – ANNIVERSARY
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 2007

HALO 5: GUARDIANS
SYSTEM: XBOX ONE
YEAR: 2015

"WE FELT THE CONCEPT OF HAVING THREE PLAYER CHARACTERS REALLY MIRRORED THE WHOLE FRANCHISE, BECAUSE THE STAR WARS FILMS ALWAYS HAVE ENSEMBLE CASTS"
TIM LONGO

» *Starfighter* and *Jedi Starfighter* designer Tim Longo is currently the CEO of Twin Suns Corp.

because the *Star Wars* films always have ensemble casts," Tim reasons. "The idea behind not just having co-pilots that flew with you instead was that it would allow players to jump between the characters, and to get the experience of flying different ships. Also, one of the things we would always talk about was how we could introduce new characters into the canon, so we created Rhys, Vana, Nym and Reti."

By way of an introduction to *Starfighter*, a training level was designed for the game, and although its canyon setting was suitably linear, it required a good bit of practice. "What was interesting about the training mission was that it probably came from the first-person shooters we had worked on," Tim ponders, "but in retrospect we actually regretted it being set in a canyon. It really pushed the player forward, but it wasn't like an FPS, where you're running and can stop at any time. You were flying a ship, so you were going to bounce off the walls. It should have been much more open and forgiving, because if you weren't good at the flying then it was a frustrating way to start the game."

» [PlayStation 2] One of *Starfighter*'s missions requires all four of the game's heroes to enter battle together.

After *Starfighter*'s orientation stage, its first real test was a routine escort mission that soon became a firefight, the design of which came from conflicting requirements. "Like the films, we wanted to open with some action pretty quickly to give people that *Star Wars* feel," Tim observes, "but at the same time the first mission couldn't be too hard. So the idea of dropping you in it early on was very much about giving you that cinematic feel by having something happen right off the bat."

In direct contrast to this trial-by-fire for rookie Rhys Dallows, *Starfighter* next had you playing seasoned vet Vana Sage on a seek-and-destroy mission. "There was a goal to have as much variety as we could within the limits of the genre," Tim explains. "It was about how we could keep things interesting in a game where you were flying ships the whole time. So we challenged ourselves to make a stealth mission in a flight game, which isn't very common. We were also establishing Vana's character, and doing some different things with her."

A subsequent challenge saw pirate Nym take his heavy bomber and motley crew on a star freighter heist, with a view to crash

» [PlayStation 2] A highlight of *Starfighter* is when hero Rhys guides wisecracking Reti through narrow canyons at night.

landing it on a planet, and looting it there. "It changed the gameplay quite a bit when you had a ship with different capabilities," Tim says of Nym's bomber. "It allowed us to contrast the previous missions, and at the same time it showcased Nym's abilities. We were always thinking outside the box, and that mission was particularly memorable because you got to do so many interesting things as Nym."

The fourth *Starfighter* hero – Reti – wasn't a player character, despite having his own ship and helping out on missions, although there were plans for this to change. "Reti was always intended to be a supporting character, the comic relief," Tim recalls. "He was an NPC that we used to build out the cast of characters; he was *Starfighter*'s C-3PO. But he was also a beloved character of the *Starfighter* development team, and our intention was to make him a little bit more of a prominent

COOL CHARACTERS

THE UNLIKELY PROTAGONISTS THROWN TOGETHER IN STARFIGHTER

RHYS DALLOWS

■ Rhys Dallows is the ideal player character to begin *Starfighter* with, as you join him during flight and aerial combat training on his home world Naboo. The missions he undertakes get gradually tougher, until you take him into the game's finale as part of a Naboo squadron.

VANA SAGE

■ A Naboo Starfighter pilot from the age of 15, Vana left when her planet's security forces refused to strengthen its weak defences. In her first *Starfighter* mission, she's testing ships for the Trade Federation, but she joins the fight against it when it tries to kill her.

NYM

■ A polar opposite to clean cut Rhys Dallows, pirate captain Nym is rough around the edges, takes no prisoners and leads a crew that's always focussed on its next score. When it suits his needs, however, he takes up arms against the Trade Federation with Rhys, Vana and Reti.

RETI

■ As well as supporting *Starfighter*'s player characters when they go into battle, Reti provides some welcome comic relief. His fretting when Rhys escorts his ship through a canyon at night is especially amusing, and it contrasts nicely with the tense nature of that mission.

» [PlayStation 2] The river mission in *Starfighter* is as notable for its visuals as it is for its challenge.

"WITH THE NIGHT-TIME CANYON MISSION, WE WERE TRYING TO SIMULATE SOME OF THAT TRENCH RUN FEEL FROM THE DEATH STAR SCENE IN STAR WARS"
TIM LONGO

character down the road." Aside from character building, *Starfighter* celebrated the planet Naboo, the beauty of which was demonstrated by a night-time canyon mission and a river escort challenge. "We wanted to show off what could be done there visually, and Naboo was quite a beautiful planet with rolling hills," Tim enthuses. "With the night-time canyon mission, we were trying to simulate some of that trench run feel from the Death Star scene in *Star Wars*, and Beggar's Canyon on Tatooine from *Episode I*. We also wanted a mission that wasn't that hard, so we made some of the enemies in the river level sitting ducks, because we just wanted players to have some fun blowing stuff up!"

There was more to blow up in *Starfighter*'s final mission, which dropped pilot Rhys Dallows into a ragtag Naboo squadron tasked with taking out a huge enemy craft.

"The end of the original *Star Wars* movie was very much about a rebel squadron, so we wanted Rhys to feel like Luke in that moment," Tim acknowledges. "It was definitely like a culmination scene in a film, where you have that fantasy of someone blowing up the big enemy ship. There was a little mirroring of what happened in *Episode I* too, where the Naboo weren't necessarily a military force. They were just trying to make do with what they had; they weren't fighters like the rebels."

On release, reviewers praised *Starfighter*, and so a sequel was planned to coincide with the *Star Wars: Episode II* movie, featuring Nym and Reti, but not Rhys or Vana. "We felt that Rhys was a little bit of a vanilla kind of a character, and of course Naboo wasn't as much of a focus of *Episode II*," Tim ▶

SUPERB SHIPS

THE STANDOUT STARSHIPS OF STARFIGHTER AND JEDI STARFIGHTER

N-1 STARFIGHTER

■ Flown by Rhys Dallows and his fellow Naboo Security Force pilots, the N-1 Starfighter is a fast and highly manoeuvrable craft. Its laser cannons are ideal weapons for dogfighting, but it only has a limited supply of bombs, and they don't cause a massive amount of damage.

GUARDIAN MANTIS

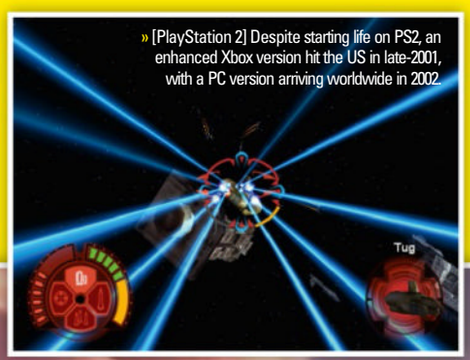
■ Vana Sage's custom-built Starfighter bomber has the N-1 beat for agility, and it can instantly come to a stop mid-flight. It's also equipped with advanced weapons. Aside from lasers and Nano Missiles, the Mantis can launch ion-enabled tags that disable enemy ship shields.

HAVOC

■ Built for blowing up heavily shielded targets, Nym's Havoc has an endless supply of laser bombs, although they're temporarily put out of use when they're being recharged. The Havoc isn't the fastest ship in *Starfighter* or *Jedi Starfighter*, but it can take a lot of damage.

JEDI STARFIGHTER

■ Officially known as the Delta-7 Aethersprite-class Light Interceptor, the Jedi Starfighter has two canons, but the model Adi Gallia flies in *Jedi Starfighter* has been modified to incorporate Quad-Pulse Lasers. The craft's compact and sleek design makes it extremely agile.



» [PlayStation 2] Despite starting life on PS2, an enhanced Xbox version hit the US in late-2001, with a PC version arriving worldwide in 2002.

» [PlayStation 2] One of *Jedi Starfighter*'s two-player missions pits an X-Wing against a TIE Fighter.

» [PlayStation 2] Jedi Adi Gallows is introduced in *Jedi Starfighter*, and soon joins forces with Nym and Reti.

USE THE FORCE

THE SPECIAL ABILITIES AT YOUR DISPOSAL IN JEDI STARFIGHTER

FORCE SHIELD

■ Although all of the ships in *Jedi Starfighter* have a certain amount of shielding, this typically gets depleted in the course of missions. Jedi Adi Gallia's Force Shield is different, in that it gives full protection against laser strikes, and can be called on at any time.

FORCE LIGHTNING

■ There's more to Force Lightning than you might think. It's a lightning strike that Adi can target enemies with, but if their craft are near others then it engulfs them too, making it great for attacking swarms of foes. Its one failing is that it doesn't work on big ships.

FORCE REFLEX

■ Essentially Bullet Time for Jedis, Force Reflex's advantages become clear when you're attacking larger craft that take a lot of hits to dispatch. Besides allowing Adi to drill multiple shots into them in no time at all, it also puts their return fire into slow motion.

FORCE SHOCKWAVE

■ The Force Shockwave is capable of destroying any small ships that it comes into contact with, and inflicting major damage on larger craft that is washes over. Its only major disadvantage is its relatively short range, so you need foes to be quite close by when you use it.

» [PlayStation 2] You play as bounty hunter Jango Fett in one of *Jedi Starfighter*'s bonus missions.

▶ considers. "Having some different and diverse characters was important to us too. I don't remember specifically where Rhys and Vana's story went, but Nym was a team favourite, and that whole *pirate* feel in *Star Wars* had always been a thing. Then with Reti, he had become that iconic *Starfighter* character that we just had to have in there."

Joining Nym and Reti in *Starfighter*'s follow-up was new player character Adi Gallows, a Jedi pilot, whose introduction explained the sequel's title: *Jedi Starfighter*. "We had access to the *Episode II* scripts before the movie was made, and once we understood that there were Jedi Starfighter ships we thought it was the perfect opportunity to use a Jedi character," Tim remembers. "We had a basic foundation from the first game, although we had found out there were only so many things you could do with that formula. But because the second game was Jedi-based we could bring Jedi powers into the missions, and make those part of the gameplay."

» [PlayStation 2] Concept art for *Jedi Starfigher* can be unlocked if you make enough progress in the game.

» [PlayStation 2] Completing certain tasks in *Jedi Starfighter* unlocks bonus ships that you can take into any mission.

» [PlayStation 2] You get rewarded for accomplishing hidden objectives in *Jedi Starfighter*'s missions.

Of course, these powers had to be useful to a Jedi in a combat spacecraft, and so shields, a lighting strike, a shock wave and godlike reflexes were chosen as options. "As far as making the powers work with the gameplay, the abilities really just came from our Jedi heritage," Tim muses, "although we were thinking of things that would work well for a space shooter. Like the Force Reflex, which allowed a Starfighter to do things in magical ways. We had taken a similar approach with the powers in *Jedi Knight*. Except those made sense in a first-person shooter, and for *Jedi Starfighter* we were thinking about what made sense for a ship."

Another aspect of *Jedi Starfighter* that differentiated it from its predecessor was its multiplayer offering, which was on a far grander scale with various modes and unlockables. "The multiplayer stuff in *Starfighter* was actually a skunk works project that was never planned for the game," Tim recollects. "Andy Kirmse basically coded that on the side in his own time, but it was so much fun that we decided to ship the game with it. What that allowed us to do with *Jedi Starfighter* was to be more intentional with it. So we formed modes around it, and gave it some more love. I think one of the reasons it was important to us was really that the team were fans of multiplayer."

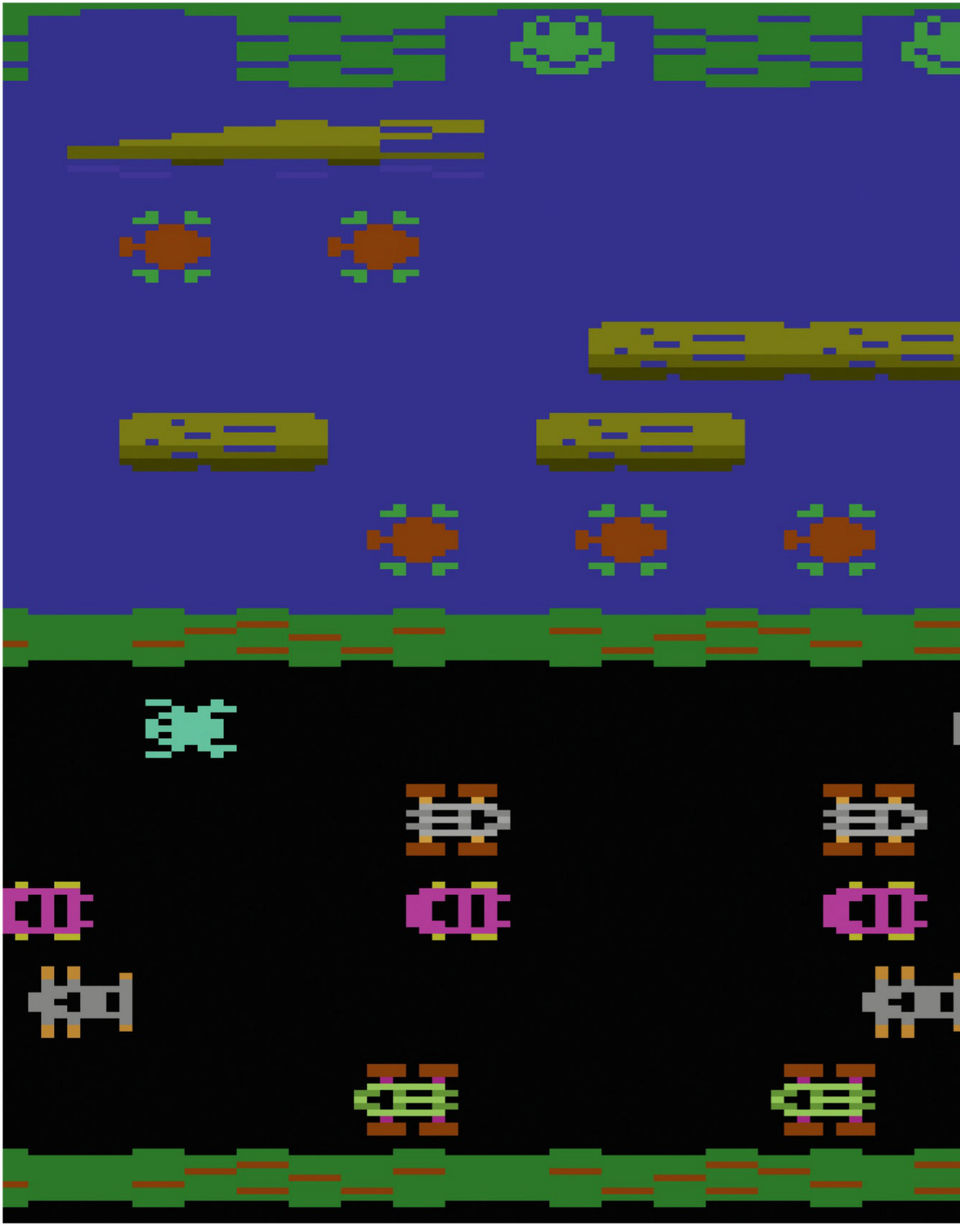
Further enhancing *Jedi Starfighter*'s offering was a wealth of bonus content, including bonus missions, bonus ships, concept art and previews of future *Star Wars* games. "We were just trying to give the player more reward for their time, and LucasArts as a company was also good at that stuff," Tim qualifies. "It had an infrastructure that a lot of companies didn't necessarily have, so we leveraged the video department and the art department to help with the bonus content. We wouldn't have put those unlikely bonus ships in the main game, because they were too unbalancing, but having them as *unlockable* ships allowed us to have some fun."

> "BECAUSE THE SECOND GAME WAS JEDI-BASED WE COULD BRING JEDI POWERS INTO THE MISSIONS, AND MAKE THOSE PART OF THE GAMEPLAY"
> **TIM LONGO**

One other novel feature in *Jedi Starfighter* was the inclusion of hidden secondary objectives, which were optional, but greatly added to the game's replay value. "It was an era where you had games with hidden things there to be discovered by the player, so we wanted players to have that feel," Tim reflects. "We wanted them to be rewarded by exploring and experimenting. To be honest, I think the hidden objectives were an experiment of ours too. We wondered if they would be cool, so we just experimented with giving players that additional layer of gameplay."

Although popular among the dwindling number of space combat fans, *Jedi Starfighter* didn't receive a sequel, although if it had then Reti would have been a main character. "We ended *Jedi Starfighter* with a cliff-hanger for Reti, and ultimately we intended to do a third game with him," Tim reveals, "but I think the genre wasn't going to support the kinds of goals LucasArts had. So it decided that it didn't want to move forward with it unfortunately. It was a business decision, in a way. I think maybe one more *Rogue Squadron* game came out after *Jedi Starfighter*, but from a sales and interest perspective even that series was waning."

In reviewing *Starfighter* and *Jedi Starfighter*, Tim still rates their gameplay, and he obviously has a soft spot for the games. So much so that he plans to dig out his PS2. "I'm actually working with people today who worked on both of those games, and we're all very proud of them," Tim beams. "I do think they've stood the test of time, because that fundamental concept of flying spacecraft is always going to be a fun thing to do. I was proud with the sweet spot we found with making arcadey versions of those sorts of games, and talking about the *Starfighter* titles makes me want to go back and play them again." ✱



The Official Frogger

IT'S FROGGER, BUT SUPERCHARGED

» ATARI 2600 » 1983 » STARPATH

One of the things that has always impressed me about the Atari 2600 is its versatility. There's an interesting range of games across the console's lifespan, covering a large number of genres and some of them are very technically impressive.

That versatility also extends to the many add-ons and peripherals that were created for the console, with one of the most interesting being the Starpath Supercharger. Originally released in 1982, it only lasted two short years due to its creator Starpath filing for bankruptcy. It's a fascinating device however, as it literally 'supercharges' your humble console.

The Supercharger is able to play suitably enhanced games on the system thanks to it adding an additional 6KB of RAM to the machine. Games are loaded via cassette using an audio cassette cable and some of the results are quite frankly staggering.

Take *Frogger* for example. The version many will be instantly familiar with is the game by Parker Brothers, which is a solid adaptation of Konami's arcade hit. Starpath's version however is on another level, with fantastic high-resolution graphics, far more accurate enemy patterns and ambitious audio.

I only discovered the game a few years ago via emulation and it quite frankly blew me away. I used to love playing the original Parker Brothers version, so Starpath's offering probably would have fried my brain if I saw it back in 1983.

Sadly, if you want to experience this enhanced version of *Frogger* for yourself then you're going to have to dig deep. Unboxed Superchargers typically start at £50 and while some loose tapes are quite cheap, *The Official Frogger*'s desirability means you're unlikely to get a complete copy for under £250.

As far as I'm aware Starpath's version of *Frogger* has never cropped up on any later compilations, which is a real pity. If anyone knows differently then please get in touch, I'll be extremely grateful.

THE MAKING OF KATAKIS

THE COMMODORE 64 WAS HOST TO MANY A GREAT SHMUP, SCROLLING IN ALL DIRECTIONS. ONE OF THE MORE NOTABLE EXAMPLES WAS RAINBOW ARTS' KATAKIS – AND IT WAS NOT ONLY FAMOUS FOR ITS HIGH QUALITY BUT ALSO FOR ITS HIGHLY EXTRAORDINARY DEVELOPMENT STORY

WORDS BY PAUL KAUTZ

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** RAINBOW ARTS
- **DEVELOPER:** RAINBOW ARTS
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **PLATFORM:** C64, AMIGA
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

Every C64 owner knows Manfred Trenz: the father of *Turrican*, one of the best-known shooters on the C64. But before *Turrican* there was *Katakis* – and before *Katakis* there was the German computer magazine *64'er* which hosted an animation competition in its June 1986 issue. The then 20-year-old Manfred had already had his first contact with 8-bit computers two years prior and was immediately captivated by them, whereupon he taught himself BASIC and Assembler programming. At the same time, he was also a talented graphic artist who had a lot of fun with the popular painting program Koala Painter. Putting all of that together resulted in Megamove II: a huge starship moving across a shiny starfield. This competition was concluded in issue 11, Manfred's animation left him in third place, securing accolades and prize money of DM 100 (about 90 of today's pounds). Much more important though was that this animation and the subsequently published pictures of his in the popular mag attracted the attention of German game studio Rainbow Arts who hired him as a graphics artist. The first projects to which he contributed his pixels were *Street Gang*, *In 80 Days Around The World* and *The Great Giana Sisters* (all released in 1987).

The other important player in the making of *Katakis* is Andreas Escher. He is slightly younger than Manfred, born on 23rd January 1966, and also a very talented pixel artist. The two knew each other from their youth, growing up in the same neighbourhood – and Manfred brought Andreas in as another graphic designer for Rainbow Arts. They shared an enthusiasm for fast arcade shmups, which then led to them wanting to develop their own game of that mould – a horizontally scrolling, graphically rich shooter with huge boss enemies – something that didn't exist on the C64 back then. Manfred took care of all the programming and parts of the game design, while Andreas was responsible for all of the graphics and the general design.

At first, however, this was just a hobby project for the two – especially for Andreas, as he was working full time on another game for Rainbow Arts at the time. And according to musician Chris Huelsbeck it wasn't even known that Manfred could code: "Up until then he was only doing graphics," he says. "It was with this project that people found out that Manfred was actually a great programmer and wanted to create his own games."

After a few months of tinkering, Rainbow Arts founder Marc Alexander Ullrich played an early build of the game, saw great potential in it and gave the two his development blessing – from which point *Katakis* took its official course. The name came to Manfred while he was scrolling through the

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE GREAT GIANA SISTERS
SYSTEM: C64, AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1987

MUDS: MEAN UGLY DIRTY SPORT
SYSTEM: DOS, ATARI ST, AMIGA
YEAR: 1990

TURRICAN II: THE FINAL FIGHT (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: C64, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1991

ANDREAS ESCHER

Games like *Turrican* benefitted from Andreas' pixel craft. He kept on working with Manfred Trenz and Teut Weidemann for many years, and now works in the gambling industry as a technical artist.

» How everything started: With pictures like this one, printed in the German computer magazine *64'er*, Manfred Trenz attracted the attention of Rainbow Arts.

» [C64] Some of the boss monsters are surprisingly huge in size. Unfortunately many of them hardly pose any real threat.

» [C64] *Katakis* was not a particularly deep game – but from a technological point of view it was highly impressive for 1988.

» [C64] *Katakis*' story is pretty much a retelling of *The Terminator* – the machines are fighting back and you should really stop them from doing so.

CHRIS HUELSBECK

Chris is considered by many to be a living legend and is one of the most celebrated musicians of the C64 and Amiga era. He currently lives in the US and still composes on most days.

TEUT WEIDEMANN

Teut Weidemann was a producer at Rainbow Arts. He is currently the creative director at Stratosphere Games in Berlin and the lead designer of the Gearbox-published *Homeworld Mobile*.

WILLI BAECKER

Willi was one of the founders of Factor 5 and was involved in most of the company's games. He has kept himself active in the gaming industry throughout the years but now mostly works in horticulture.

INSPIRED BY...

KATAKIS' MANY SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

"Manfred loved the main theme of the 1986 Chuck Norris movie *The Delta Force*, and absolutely wanted it to be in *Katakis*," Chris Huelsbeck tells us. "I also was a big fan, and so I sat down and programmed it into my Soundmonitor tool. Manfred loved the result, and so he and Andreas sent more and more tapes with some of their favourite songs my way that they wanted me to put into the game's soundtrack as well." The result was that four of the seven available level tracks are more or less cover versions of contemporary music – the theme of levels 3, 7 and 11 is based on *Alisand* by Hugh Bullen (1985), the level 4 track is also known as *My Dream* by Shamall (1986), levels 2 and 9 are accompanied by a SID version of Laserdance's *Humanoid Invasion* (1986) – and *The Delta Force* theme is what you hear in levels 5 and 12.

Music is not the only thing though that gave a whole lot of inspiration to *Katakis*, the entirety of the final level (including its boss) is based on the Alien designs of HR Giger. The 1987 TV series *Captain Power And The Soldiers Of The Future* was a favourite of Manfred's which he not only acknowledged in *Katakis*' outro text, but also made Soaron, one of the series' bad guys, the boss of Area 10. But most of the inspiration came from contemporary shoot-'em-ups like *Darius*, *Gradius* and pretty much the entirety of *R-Type*. For more on that, please see The *R-Type* Connection.

"IT WAS WITH THIS PROJECT THAT PEOPLE FOUND OUT THAT MANFRED WAS A GREAT PROGRAMMER AND WANTED TO CREATE HIS OWN GAMES"
CHRIS HUELSBECK

THE R-TYPE CONNECTION

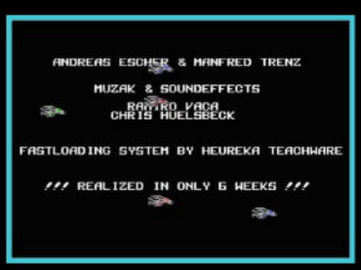
HOW CLONING LED TO AN OFFICIAL PORT

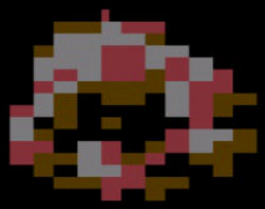
"Manfred and I were huge fans of the arcade version of *R-Type* and wanted to bring a game like that to the C64." This is how Andreas Escher describes their main motivation for creating *Katakis* in the first place. They knew the original game inside and out, and transferred their favourite parts into *Katakis*, including the indestructible satellite, the rechargeable Super Shot, a huge spaceship as a level, enemies dragging spider web-like obstacles behind them – even the congratulatory ending text is lifted verbatim from *R-Type*, with the exception of one word (Machine instead of Bydo) and one typo (anhinilated).

According to Teut Weidemann, no one at Rainbow Arts ever tried to secure the official *R-Type* licence from Irem. "This simply was not the business model of Rainbow Arts back then," he says. "We did not run around trying to secure arcade licences. We received many game proposals each week, and of those we picked what we thought would be great fun and sell well." The *R-Type* licence was secured though, by Activision. As it was the legal owners of the *R-Type* brand on home-computer systems and had its very own version in the works at that moment, developed by the small studio Catalyst Coders, consisting of David Jolliff and James Smart, it threw a cease-and-desist letter Rainbow Arts' way. "They did it not to get rid of *Katakis* but just to slow it down, so that they could have their official *R-Type* game in stores for the very important holiday season," says Teut. Rainbow Arts weren't the only ones on the receiving end of this approach: According to the 1988 issue 12 of *ACE*, Activision simultaneously targeted five games that in its opinion hit a bit too close to the *R-Type* home.

This was not the end of the story though, as Activision was not happy with its official version. Catalyst Coders had huge problems bringing the sprite-heavy *R-Type* experience to the C64. Manfred Trenz however had already proven that he was more than capable to code a graphics system fast enough for this kind of game. So Activision offered Rainbow Arts a most unusual deal, if it managed to create an official port of *R-Type* in six weeks, just in time for holiday season 1988, then everything would be forgiven and forgotten. Long story short: Manfred and Andreas managed to finish that impossible task (a fact that was explicitly mentioned in the game's credits), by heavily recycling their *Katakis* codebase and graphics assets, cutting every possible corner, and using the title screen by Mark Jones which was originally meant to be used in the Activision version. Which, weirdly enough, was also still in development – it even received a demo version which was on the cover tape of *Computer & Video Games* in November 1988. However, after the Rainbow Arts version was done and dusted, the attempt by Catalyst Coders was immediately stopped and shelved.

In the end, Activision had its *R-Type* in stores in time for the holiday season, Rainbow Arts got out of a looming lawsuit, and *Katakis* was allowed to be revived – even though it had to be renamed to *Denaris* and altered in a few ways. The only losing party in this gamble was Catalyst Coders. According to a former colleague Bob Pape, both David Jolliff and James Smart were pushed to the brink of collapse during *R-Type*'s development, only to be left high and dry.


ANDREAS ESCHER & MANFRED TRENZ
MUZAK & SOUNDEFFECTS
RAFAEL VACA
CHRIS HUELSBECK
FASTLOADING SYSTEM BY HEUREKA TEACHWARE
/// REALIZED IN ONLY 6 WEEKS ///



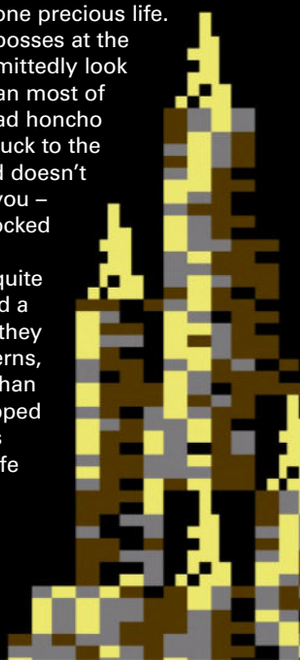
telephone book of Gütersloh, where he came across a Greek contemporary with the surname Katakis – which he liked so much that he made it the name of his game.

Katakis is a typical horizontal shmup, offering twelve areas: you start in an asteroid field, then cross into a computer world full of circuit boards and microchips, visit organic-looking levels, a giant spaceship, a lava cave and an alien nest. Each level can usually be finished in one or two minutes – provided you know what you're doing, as the difficulty level was quite hard, even by the standards of the time. It should have been even higher as Andreas tells us, "The original version of *Katakis* was actually much harder than what we've ended up with. Manfred and I knew the game inside and out and thought that it really wasn't that difficult – but everybody else thought that we were crazy! We were heavily encouraged to lower the difficulty for the final version. Which, ironically, was still considered to be quite hard!"

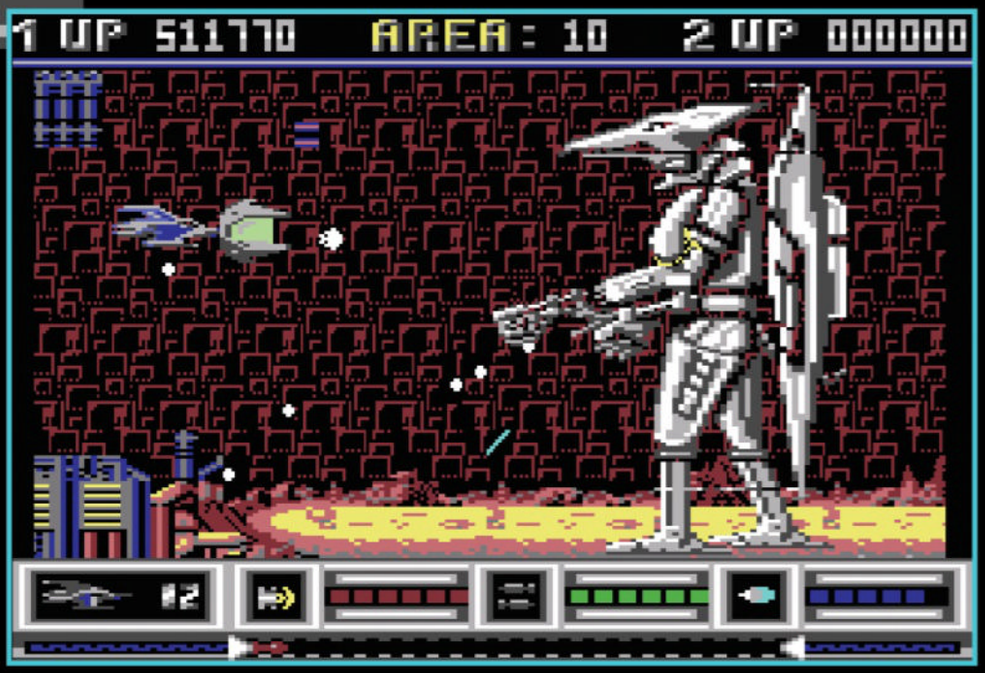
Continuously hammering on the fire button releases a stream of single shots, while holding it down charges a much bigger and stronger power beam. Collecting coloured spheres gives you a wealth of different weapons and extras like smart bombs, speed-ups or a protective force field. And of course there's your trusty indestructible satellite that can be mounted in front or in the back of your DS-H7 5 Eagle Fighter and that comes in three sizes, depending on how many so-called Geega Crystals you've collected – each one bringing a new weapon with it.

The regular enemies falling victim to those weapons are for the most part not particularly interesting – some are simple geometric shapes, some look slightly organic, some are ripped straight out of *R-Type* – and there's tons of them. Additionally, the slightest contact with one of their bullets costs you one precious life. Then there's also the big bosses at the end of each area, who admittedly look much more dangerous than most of them actually are. The head honcho of area 6 for example is stuck to the huge ship around him and doesn't move while he shoots at you – and these shots are all blocked by your useful satellite.

Most other bosses are quite similar: they move forward a bit, they move back a bit, they fire in easy-to-follow patterns, and they go down faster than a redshirt on a booby-trapped planet. All of that changes though when you lose a life



» [C64] Your nifty space hopper is called the DS-H7 5 Eagle Fighter. You start the game with three of them, and each finished level gives an additional one as a bonus.



» [C64] *Katakis* features 12 challenging levels. Each one of them is quite short and topped off with a boss fight.

and are left without the satellite. And in any case, the narrowly designed levels are the biggest threat to your ship that is just that little bit too big for its own good.

All frustration aside, *Katakis* is a sweet treat for the eye – tons of sprites are simultaneously in the picture, much more than the brave little C64 should actually be able to handle. Gigantic bosses, partly animated backgrounds, interesting foregrounds, fine parallax scrolling, and all of this at a smooth 50 frames per second. Today, of course, it looks a bit rough due to the C64's low resolution, but nevertheless the distinctive art still shines through.

All of the original design ideas were first pencilled down on paper by Andreas, then pre-planned on graph paper and ultimately hacked into the C64 – or rather shot, as Paint Magic, the tool used for some of the pictures, utilised the joystick for pixel placement. For the most part, however, custom-built software came into play, as Andreas tells us, "Most of the tools that we used to build *Katakis* with were custom-made by Manfred – simply because the existing ones were rather lousy and not tailored to our specific needs."

Still, the question most *Katakis* players asked back then was, how on earth did Manfred perform these coding miracles? An important part of the answer is that what you see on the screen is not made up of pre-painted bitmaps, but of redefined character sets from the C64 instead – letters and symbols that are replaced by very small graphic elements. There are 256 of them, which were then pieced together laboriously to form each sprite and each part of the landscape.

Another thing that *Katakis* is quite famous for is its pumping soundtrack – and no wonder, as Chris Huelsbeck was responsible for creating the tunes, using his own Soundmonitor tool which he slightly expanded for this project. "Working on *Katakis* was very cool", he explains. "I've always loved fast arcade games, and to be part of the team that created one felt very special. It's quite a major gaming milestone in retrospect, and I am very happy to have been a part of it." Creating the music for *Katakis* took him about two months and was filled with lots of listening to certain tapes – check out Inspired By for more information on crafting *Katakis*' excellent score.

According to producer Teut Weidemann, the rest of Rainbow Arts didn't get to see Chris for much of that time as he tended to work at nights. "A lot of his music that is rightly being called brilliant today, he always did last minute. People asked him, 'Do you have the soundtrack or the title track for that game ready?' 'Uh, nope, I don't', and then he pulls an all-nighter and the next day it's done. And those tended to be his greatest compositions," he tells us with a huge grin. Chris confirmed this, saying, "Well, you know, I just moved out of my parents' home, I loved doing what I did, and no one told me when to go to bed. In your early twenties you have all the energy in the world, and so I worked as much as I could, making music, programming, sometimes 48 hours in a row followed by eight hours of sleep and then another 48 hours of work. And of course it was easiest for a

» [C64] The game's regular enemies are simple shapes for the most part.

"THE ORIGINAL VERSION OF KATAKIS WAS MUCH HARDER THAN WHAT WE'VE ENDED UP WITH"
ANDREAS ESCHER

» [C64] *Katakis* was (and is) a beast of a game – and originally it was supposed to be even harder!

▶ musician to do what we do when no one else was around. Most people left around 7pm which meant that I had the office for myself up until 8 or 9 in the morning. No telephone, no conversations, no distractions – for a musician, that was just perfect!"

All of this resulted in a huge success, as reviewers loved *Katakis*: in the 42nd issue of Zzap!64 (October 1988), the game not only appears on the cover of the magazine, calling it "Our type of game," but also receives a spectacular 93% overall rating and the coveted Sizzler award. Paul Glancey had the following to say, "Every now and then a game comes along without any hype or fuss, and turns out to be something really impressive. *Katakis* is one of those." A score of 86% was given in *Commodore Computing International*, with the following conclusion by Tony Horgan, "If you can find room to squeeze another scrolly shooter into your collection, *Katakis* will fill the gap nicely. Highly recommended!" Only Julian 'Jaz' Rignall went slightly lower in the September 88 issue of *Commodore User* (8/10), and criticised the game's blatant proximity to *R-Type* – but still commented that he "found the action very enjoyable".

Katakis' release was followed by a legal dispute with Activision (see The *R-Type* Connection), an Amiga conversion that no one saw coming (see That Other Game) and a renaming from *Katakis* to *Denaris*, as a result of the aforementioned legal trouble. According to Teut, that was actually not that big of a deal for Rainbow Arts. "There were several reasons why *Katakis* had to be changed to *Denaris*," he says. "On the one hand, there was still the injunction from Activision, which might have made some retailers afraid to put the game on their shelves. On the other hand, *Katakis* had already been out for a while at that point, so it had been pirated, the sales were through. By releasing it again as *Denaris*, it was treated as a new title. Which also gave us a chance to improve the game a bit. A couple of bugs were fixed, the Amiga version had an additional level. And we also managed to cram the game on one disk instead of two as before. Long tracks were used, which increased the capacity of the disk, was a solid copy protection and lowered production costs." In the end, everybody was happy with the result, "I don't have precise numbers, unfortunately, but I know it was quite profitable as the development costs were really very low," says Teut.

» [C64] *Katakis* supports several two-player modes: you can either take turns or play co-operatively. The latter mode is quite buggy though.

Still, the name *Katakis*/*Denaris* was not heard again much after that. Manfred and Andreas focussed on a new project with the once again telephone book-based name *Turrican*, which according to Andreas, "Turned out to be a massive success while *Katakis* went into oblivion." Over the course of the following years there were many attempts to bring it back in one form or another, like the mid-92 *Enforcer: Fullmetal Megablaster*, which was a unofficial *Katakis* sequel developed by Manfred – unfortunately exclusively on the C64 and only available in Germany, so not too many people ever got to play it. In 2001, Manfred and Andreas tried their hands on an official sequel, *Katakis 3D*, developed for the Game Boy Color – which looked and played very well, sporting a *Rebel Assault*-like 3D environment and lots of action. Sadly, after about five months of almost completed development, the game's company Similis cut the rope for reasons unknown.

» [C64] Each of the game's areas was loaded separately. That increased the waiting times but allowed a more diverse level design.

» [C64] Area 11 starts you off without your trusty satellite or any extras!

Throughout the Noughties there were several announcements of *Katakis 2* which never came to any fruition. What was released however, was *Crush* in June 2017: a game clearly in the vein of *Katakis*, developed by VIS Games – the gaming branch of demo group Smash Designs, led by André Buerger, aka AEG. According to him, the game had to be put on hold for many years because there were legal disputes between Manfred and Factor 5, which had acquired the legal rights to the *Katakis* brand in the meantime. When the light did turn green eventually, André says the project was completed in a hurry from existing assets and released under the name *Crush* on Steam and as *Space Blaze* on PS4 and Switch at the end of 2019.

Unfortunately, it's not a particularly good game, and certainly not the best legacy for *Katakis*. While the original C64 shooter did not feature any revolutionary game design, it delivered rock-solid shooter action, was a technical marvel back then and led many of the people connected to it to astonishing careers in the gaming industry. Not bad for something that was named after a random encounter in a phone book. ✱

Many thanks to Andreas Escher, Chris Huelsbeck, Teut Weidemann, Willi Baecker, Lutz Osterkorn, André Buerger, and Juergen Goeldner.

THAT OTHER GAME

HOW A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT GAME ALSO BECAME KATAKIS

After wrapping up the C64 version of *Katakis*, Manfred and Andreas intended to port the game to the Amiga – but right then they had neither the time nor the necessary technical understanding to do so. Enter Factor 5, or rather The Light Circle, which was the name of the demo and cracker group around Achim Moller, Willi Baecker and Lutz Osterkorn: three young friends from Cologne who not only shared a passion for programming but also for playing games – particularly fast arcade shooters. At the Cebit fair in Hanover in 1988, they were able to take a look at the then hot PC-Engine, which ran an excellent port of *R-Type*. They were so enthusiastic about it that on the way back from Hanover to Cologne they decided to create a similarly good shmup on the Amiga – which led to The Light Circle's very first game.

After several months of development, the futuristically named *Neutralizer* was done, and turned out to be a rather shameless clone of *R-Type*. With this game, the three of them, who at first called themselves Factor 3 to put some distance between themselves and their cracker past, and then finally settled on Factor 5 because the company had grown a bit in the meantime, met up with Rainbow Arts. This meeting directly led to the Amiga version of *Katakis*, as *Neutralizer* very quickly underwent a transformation into the new game. This transformation mainly consisted of changing the game's logo and adapting the spaceship design – the contents of the game itself were barely touched.

This means that although there was a *Katakis* on both C64 and Amiga, and both were horizontal shooters heavily inspired by *R-Type*, the two had little else in common: completely different levels, of which there were now only six instead of twelve, different bosses, no multiplayer mode of any kind, the satellite could only be docked at the front of the ship and also was no longer indestructible. A special feature of *Neutralizer*/*Katakis* was also that the levels did not consist of tiles or redefined character sets as Willi explains. "The levels in *Katakis* consist of a maximum of ten Deluxe Paint images lying next to each other in the memory and are not made up of repetitive tiles as in all subsequent games." Which of course was a blatant waste of space, and only barely fit into the Amiga's memory – but it made for graphically very diverse results.

Andreas and Manfred were not particularly happy with that approach – the marketing department at Rainbow Arts on the other hand was overjoyed that they were able to release *Katakis* on two computers at once, without much effort on their end. Willi has a lot of fond memories of that project. "This was our very first game and it still makes me very proud today. Not just of the resulting game but also of the fact that I got to know so many people through it. Many of them are still my friends today, with whom we went through really crazy times together. When I play it today I actually find it very difficult, but back then during development I didn't have that impression."

"WE MANAGED TO CRAM THE GAME ON ONE DISK AS OPPOSED TO TWO LIKE BEFORE"
TEUT WEIDEMANN

» [Game Boy Colour] *Katakis 3D* would have been the official sequel on the Game Boy Color – unfortunately the (almost finished) game was never published.

Sega 3-D Glasses

» **PLATFORM:** Master System » **YEAR:** 1987 » **COST:** £39.95 (launch), £75+ (today, boxed), £55+ (today, unboxed)

If you were looking for a sense of depth in your console games during the late-Eighties, Sega had a rather literal realisation of that desire for you. These glasses plug into the card slot of your Master System, and give a 3D effect when used with compatible software. The trick to these active shutter glasses is that they use LCD lenses to cover each eye in rapid succession, so that each eye sees a slightly different perspective. This produces a darker image and limits games to 30 frames per second, but the illusion is convincing.

Despite their futuristic appeal, the 3-D Glasses were not particularly successful. Not only did they cost more than most game cartridges, but you didn't get a game with them and there weren't many to choose from – just nine games support the 3-D Glasses, with support almost completely dropped after 1989. Picking them up today is awkward, as their fragile nature means many have cracked plastic, while their dependence on synchronising with the TV display means you'll need to have a CRT to use them properly. *

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

Sega 3-D Glasses fact

■ The Japanese Master System includes a dedicated jack for the 3-D Glasses, freeing up the card slot. The Master System II doesn't support them because it has no card slot.

ESSENTIAL GAME

MISSILE DEFENSE 3-D

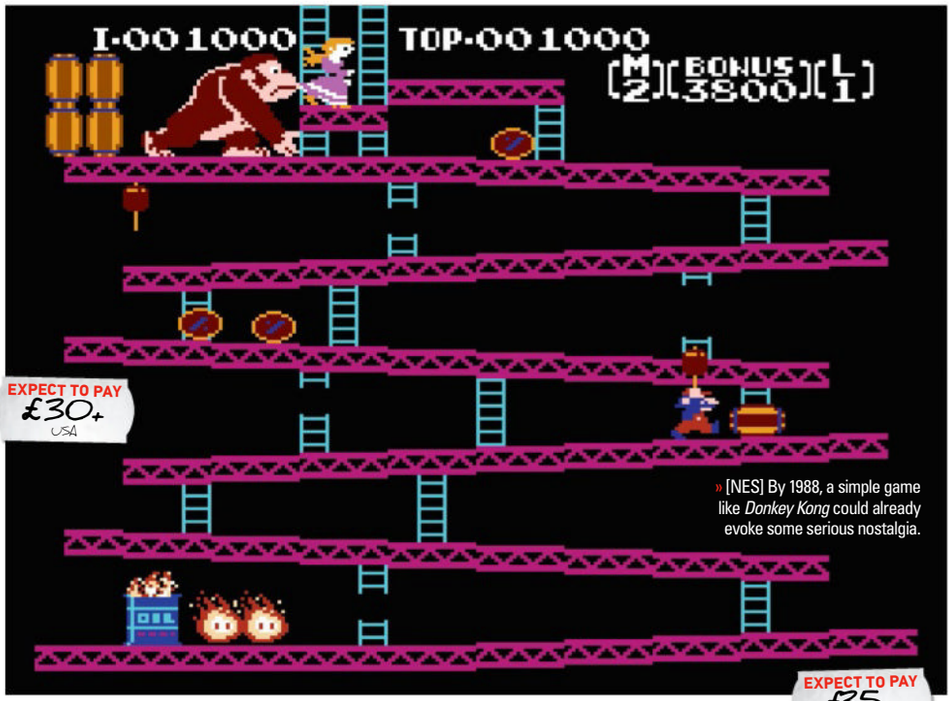
Let's face it – if you've got the 3-D Glasses kicking around, you probably have a Light Phaser too, and since you'd need a CRT to use either alone it seems churlish not to use both. Just one game lets you do that, Mark Cerny's *Missile Defense 3-D,* and if your Master System came with both peripherals it's your built-in game. Your goal is to shoot down a whole load of nuclear missiles before they reach the city, and though you get multiple chances, it only takes one to end your game.

SO YOU WANT TO COLLECT...

DONKEY KONG GAMES

The simian superstar may have been overshadowed by that pesky plumber, but Donkey Kong has been no stranger to great games over the years. Here are some you'll go ape for – and others reserved for only the most bananas of collectors

Words by Nick Thorpe



» [NES] By 1988, a simple game like *Donkey Kong* could already evoke some serious nostalgia.

DOUBLE DUTY

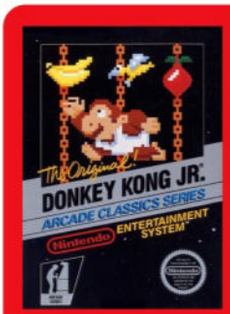
DONKEY KONG CLASSICS

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
RELEASE: 1988

As one of the most popular arcade games of the early Eighties, *Donkey Kong*'s home releases were a big deal for licensees Coleco and Atari. But Donkey Kong is a Nintendo property and we're going to focus on the Nintendo console releases here to keep things simple – and this is the most cost-effective way to enjoy some classic *Donkey Kong* on real 8-bit Nintendo hardware.

Donkey Kong Classics doesn't just contain the original platform hit, but its sequel *Donkey Kong Jr* in which the titular protagonist goes on a mission to rescue his dear old dad from that dastardly Mario. The games aren't quite perfect – *Donkey Kong* is notably missing the cement factory stage from the arcade game – but they are good fun. These versions are among the most accurate contemporary home versions of the games, too.

The cartridge comes in a distinct orange box and while it's not the cheapest NES game you'll find, your partner isn't likely to go ape over budgets if you unexpectedly grab it.



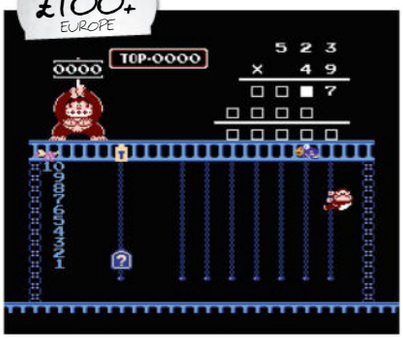
LET'S SPLIT UP

What if you want separate cartridges?

Donkey Kong and *Donkey Kong Jr* were originally released early in the life of the NES, and were individual cartridges rather than being bundled together. While they had both been relatively hot arcade games when the Famicom was launched in 1983, they were seen as being somewhat long in the tooth by the time they reached the NES in 1986 – something Nintendo acknowledged with its *Arcade Classics* branding for the games. They were ultimately overshadowed by games like *Super Mario Bros* and didn't sell tremendously well.

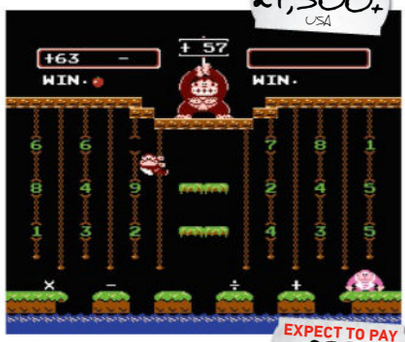
The Japanese Famicom releases aren't enormously expensive, and there's no equivalent to *Donkey Kong Classics* out there. But the individual NES carts seldom come up for sale, and they're pricey – data gathered by pricecharting.com suggests that you can expect to pay around £260 for *Donkey Kong* and £175 for *Donkey Kong Jr* in their North American incarnations, or £300 and £125 respectively for PAL versions. Happy hunting!

EXPECT TO PAY £100+ EUROPE



» [NES] We would sooner go back to Mr Kitson's maths class than play this game ever again.

EXPECT TO PAY £1,300+ USA



» [NES] This is not a fun game. We do not recommend it in any way.

EXPECT TO PAY £85+ JAPAN

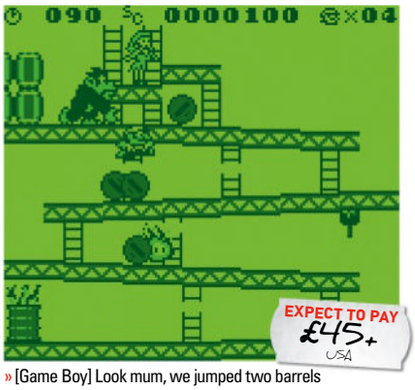
A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

DONKEY KONG JR MATH

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO R&D2/SRD CO
RELEASE: 1983

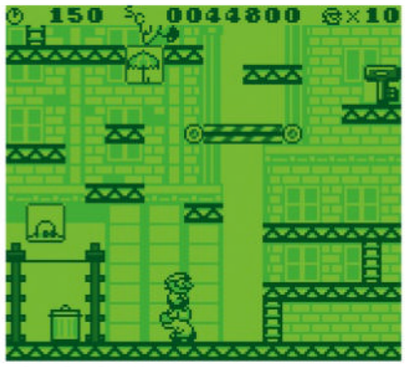
■ It's fair to say that Nintendo didn't put all of its eggs in one basket when it launched the NES – not only did it have ROB as a strong gimmick for American retailers that were wary of videogames, but it supplied an edutainment game to allay any fears over videogames rotting the brains of the youth. However, kids didn't want to do sums with Donkey Kong's young lad, and Nintendo quickly ditched its educational line.

Donkey Kong Jr Math offers very little in the way of fun, which is no surprise. What is more of a surprise is that Nintendo released it worldwide, though it was wise to test the preferences of each market. It's an expensive rarity in general and particularly in the US, and while we're hardly ones to judge anybody else's purchasing decisions, we're hopeful that a maths lesson will help buyers not to blow so much money on boring games in the future.



EXPECT TO PAY £45+ USA

» [Game Boy] Look mum, we jumped two barrels at once! We are extremely proud of ourselves.



» [Game Boy] Pick things up, throw them, do side jumps – anything is possible, it's 1994.

94 IS TOP DRAWER

DONKEY KONG

EXPECT TO PAY £30+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD/PAX SOFTNICA
RELEASE: 1994

EXPECT TO PAY £15+ JAPAN

■ This platformer is often referred to as *Donkey Kong 94*, and we feel that it is an essential game – it's widely acclaimed as one of the greatest Game Boy games ever and it served as a flagship game for the Super Game Boy too. The game starts off as an adaptation of the arcade game, only to massively expand on it with additional mechanics and dozens of brand-new and more complex stages. The game is moderately priced because it's so highly regarded, and even a loose cartridge can set you back £10. If you're looking to collect variants, *Nintendo Classics* and *Players' Choice* budget reissues were released in Europe and North America respectively.

COUNTRY OF THE COLOSSAL

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

EXPECT TO PAY £65+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: RARE
RELEASE: 1994

EXPECT TO PAY £50+ USA

■ What can you say about *Donkey Kong Country* that hasn't already been said? This is the platform game that revitalised the SNES at a time when Nintendo was well behind its competitors in developing a next-generation console, smashed sales records and cemented Rare as one of the world's most prominent development teams. Although it sold millions of copies, high demand means that the game commands relatively high prices. That's especially true in Europe where the *Go Ape* music CD, an essential part of the complete package, is often missing. Interestingly, complete Super Famicom copies regularly sell for incredibly low prices on Japanese auction sites. Game Boy Color and Game Boy Advance versions are also available.

» [SNES] I wouldn't want to work for King K Rool and get a rhino's horn up the rear for my trouble.

EXPECT TO PAY £2.50+ JAPAN

» [SNES] *Donkey Kong Country* still looks great if you've got a CRT TV or a convincing fake.

SUBLIME SEQUELS

The other SNES games in the series

EXPECT TO PAY £35+ EUROPE
EXPECT TO PAY £55+ USA
EXPECT TO PAY £5+ JAPAN

Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest

Diddy and his girlfriend Dixie team up to rescue Donkey Kong from King K Rool in this trickily titled follow-up. Though the first game had a greater impact upon its release, this one still sold millions of copies and many fans of Donkey Kong feel that it is not only a better game than the original, but the best game of the whole *Donkey Kong Country* series.

EXPECT TO PAY £45+ EUROPE
EXPECT TO PAY £60+ USA
EXPECT TO PAY £5+ JAPAN

Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie Kong's Double Trouble!

Dixie and her cousin Kiddy Kong are the stars of the final SNES entry in the *Donkey Kong Country* series, which actually released after the N64's launch in both Japan and North America but still sold in its millions. It's arguably not quite as good as its predecessors, but offers a well-crafted challenge for any fan of platform games regardless.

Sets within sets
■ With a series like *Donkey Kong*, it's easy to break things down into manageable chunks by focussing on sub-series – *Country*, *Land*, and so on.

Box clever
■ Being on Nintendo platforms, many *Donkey Kong* games come in cardboard boxes, which tend to fluctuate greatly in price based on their condition.

Look around
■ Facebook groups and local sales listings can often offer better deals than eBay, especially for more recent retro platforms like the Wii.

Looking East
■ The Japanese Yen has been weakening in foreign exchange markets in recent years, giving importers some extra purchasing power at present.

LAND OF THE LITTLE

DONKEY KONG LAND

EXPECT TO PAY £7+ JAPAN
EXPECT TO PAY £25+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: RARE
RELEASE: 1995

■ Creating a SNES game with pre-rendered 3D visuals was ambitious, but certainly not crazy. Trying to use those same models and cram all of that detail into the four shades of grey that the Game Boy offered? *That* was crazy. Somehow Rare didn't merely pull it off, but crafted a classic that stood as one of the best portable games of the mid-Nineties. As is standard for the series, demand keeps complete boxed prices moderate but loose carts can be very cheap. Confusingly, the Japanese release is called *Super Donkey Kong GB*, which implies that it's a conversion of *Donkey Kong Country* – but that's just the start of the Japanese release oddities for this handheld sub-series.

» [Game Boy] All that detail can sometimes make the action a little hard to make out.

EXPECT TO PAY £20+ USA

» [Game Boy] Like many of us, Donkey Kong loves a little frolic in the snow.

FURTHER EXPLORATION

The sequels to Donkey Kong Land

EXPECT TO PAY £30+ EUROPE
EXPECT TO PAY £40+ USA
EXPECT TO PAY £6+ JAPAN

EXPECT TO PAY £25+ EUROPE
EXPECT TO PAY £45+ USA
EXPECT TO PAY £6+ JAPAN

Donkey Kong Land 2

Much like *Donkey Kong Country 2*, this puts Diddy Kong into the starring role and introduces Dixie as a second playable character. In fact, stage designs are closer to the SNES counterpart than in the original game. In Japan this game is called *Donkey Kong Land*, so don't get it confused with the original if you happen to be importing.

Donkey Kong Land III

Once again, a Game Boy game follows the lead of the SNES game, with the final *Donkey Kong Land* starring Dixie and her cousin Kiddy. Interestingly, the Japanese release, titled *Donkey Kong GB: Dinky Kong & Dixie Kong*, came much later than the other releases and was retooled extensively to take advantage of the Game Boy Color's display capabilities.

WHEELY GOOD

DIDDY KONG RACING

EXPECT TO PAY £45+ USA

EXPECT TO PAY £25+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: RARE
RELEASE: 1997

■ While it doesn't star the big guy himself, *Diddy Kong Racing* is perhaps the most beloved of the *Donkey Kong* spin-offs. As well as allowing players to choose between karts, hovercrafts and planes, the game features an Adventure mode with exploration and boss races, making it a brilliant alternative to the more conventional *Mario Kart 64*. It also features the debuts of both Banjo and Conker, who would later go on to find success of their own. Plenty of copies are out there as it sold very well, but its status as a nostalgic favourite keeps demand high and prices moderate. There's a remake available for the Nintendo DS, but it's generally not as well-regarded as the original N64 game.

EXPECT TO PAY £8+ JAPAN

» [Nintendo 64] The freedom to fly is something we rarely get in kart racing games, sadly.

» [Nintendo 64] The ability to take the race to the water set *Diddy Kong Racing* apart from the pack.

RAP SHEET

DONKEY KONG 64

DEVELOPER: RARE
RELEASE: 1999

■ The first truly 3D *Donkey Kong* platform game was a critical and commercial smash in the Nineties, but divides opinions these days. For everyone who loves the *DK Rap* and the game's technical achievements, there's someone who feels that it highlights the flaws of the 'collectathon' model of early 3D platformers. Regardless of which side you come down on, it's a significant release as the final original *Donkey Kong* game by Rare, a studio that arguably did just as much to shape the series as Nintendo itself.

Donkey Kong 64 requires the Expansion Pak, which expands the memory of the N64 from 4MB to 8MB, and the accessory was bundled with the game as a result. The prices we've listed here reflect the complete bundle, including the Expansion Pak and the little plastic tool provided to help you remove the Jumper Pak from your N64. If those things don't worry you, you'll pay less.

EXPECT TO PAY £20+ JAPAN

EXPECT TO PAY £35+ EUROPE

» [Nintendo 64] This is your favourite song. Don't worry, you can admit it to us.

EXPECT TO PAY £75+ USA

» [Nintendo 64] Donkey Kong's done with the rap and out dispensing slaps. Word life.

SWING OUT, SIMIANS

DONKEY KONG: JUNGLE CLIMBER

EXPECT TO PAY £7+ EUROPE

EXPECT TO PAY £15+ USA

DEVELOPER: PAON
RELEASE: 2007

EXPECT TO PAY £2.50+ JAPAN

■ Paon is perhaps not the developer you'd first associate with Donkey Kong, and for good reason. The team's three games with the ape were the Game Boy Advance game *Donkey Kong: King Of Swing*, this DS sequel and the highly unfortunate Wii game *Donkey Kong Jet Race*. *Jungle Climber* is the best of the bunch, and while it's not a patch on DK's best work, it does build on the unusual ideas of its predecessor to create a more satisfying end product. Your goal is to move Donkey Kong around by using the shoulder buttons to grab pegs in the environment, swing on them and eventually climb upwards, which is quite satisfying when you get the hang of it. The dual-screen format is put to good use too, as the vertical layout is perfectly suited to a game about climbing. At its current low price, it's perhaps worth a punt.

» [DS] You can see the blocks getting smaller on the top screen. That's harshing our vibe, man.

» [GameCube] You whack bongos, Donkey Kong punches enemies. It's a truly cathartic game.

EXPECT TO PAY £65+ USA

» [GameCube] You can glide, but you'll still be doing so with the silly controller. It's good to laugh.

BONGO BRILLIANCE

DONKEY KONG: JUNGLE BEAT

EXPECT TO PAY £15+ JAPAN

EXPECT TO PAY £50+ EUROPE

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD TOKYO
RELEASE: 2004

■ Though the *Donkey Konga* music games are plenty of fun, our favourite use of the DK Bongos is this innovative platform game that emphasises rhythm and combos in its regular stages, and physical intensity in its boss fights. The prices we've listed are for a complete copy of the game with the controller – if you've already got one and you're just looking for the game, it'll cost you a fair bit less. Prices start at £10 for a PAL copy, £15 for a US one and a mere £3.50 for a Japanese game – though shipping and other charges will naturally push up that Japanese price on the way to your doorstep. There is a Wii version to consider, but be warned that it's not compatible with the DK Bongos and features some noteworthy gameplay alterations.

TRIUMPHANT RETURN

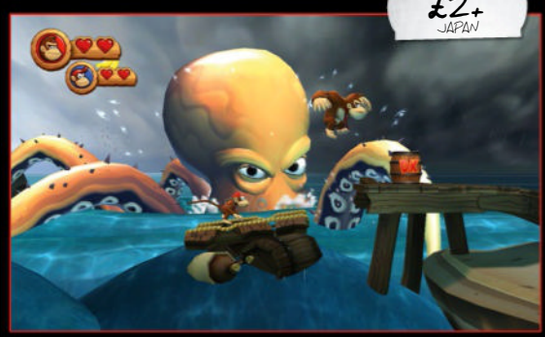
DONKEY KONG COUNTRY RETURNS

EXPECT TO PAY £5+ EUROPE/USA

DEVELOPER: RETRO STUDIOS
RELEASE: 2010

■ Donkey Kong returned to the platforming template that served him best during the Wii era, with Retro Studios picking up where Rare left off. The team managed to transition smoothly from the *Metroid Prime* series to 2D platforming, capturing the fun of the originals and delighting millions of fans. Thanks to those strong sales and the current low price of Wii games in general, *Donkey Kong Country Returns* is a cheap game across all regions – we've been conservative with our valuation as the going rate tends to be around £5-10, but we've seen it go as low as £1 in auctions. As with all Wii games, it'll work on your Wii U if you've got a remote and a sensor bar.

EXPECT TO PAY £2+ JAPAN



» [Wii] Great ape versus giant octopus? Sounds like a dodgy straight-to-DVD film to us.

PORTABLE POWER

What about the 3DS version?

Fans of handheld gaming rejoice – *Donkey Kong Country Returns 3D* brought all of the action of the Wii game to the Nintendo 3DS. This version of the game was also well-received. As you'd expect, the game features some slight graphical cutbacks compared to the original Wii version, but it does offer support for 3D display as a bonus. The other major bonus is a new world, featuring eight exclusive stages. Like its home-console counterpart, it's quite a cheap game at present because 3DS game prices are still at a relatively low level.

EXPECT TO PAY £3+ JAPAN

EXPECT TO PAY £5+ EUROPE/USA

Streets Of Rage

FIGHT TOGETHER, FIGHT FOREVER

» MEGA DRIVE » 1991 » SEGA AM7

While I've got a natural competitive streak, I do love a good bit of co-op gaming every now and again, and I genuinely think that beat-'em-ups might just be the best co-op genre. The setting is what does the trick. I've played the modern co-op classic *Overcooked* and since there are no traditional enemies to speak of, when things go awry your initially harmonious kitchen inevitably descends into bickering that would stun Gordon Ramsay. It just so happens that when you're dealing with knife-wielding thugs rather than tomato soup, the common threat you face ensures that your mind stays focussed on who your real foe is.

My greatest example of this came at the London Gaming Con in 2011, when I picked up a pad and played a co-op game of *Streets Of Rage*. My partner was a complete stranger whose name I never caught – I picked Blaze as usual and the other guy took Axel, and we went to clean up the streets together. The two of us made a fine pair. We barely uttered a word to one another after agreeing to play, but we didn't need to – he'd keep an eye on me and send in the police car when I was in trouble, and I'd leave the bin chicken alone if my health was higher than his. We made a deep run into the game, had a good time and then never saw one another again.

In less than an hour, shared adversity inspired two people that had never met to develop a sense of teamwork so thorough that it could have seemed telepathic to an outside observer. I've seen and participated in plenty of corporate team-building exercises in the years since, and they always seem rather overblown to me – all you *really* need to get people to work together is a Mega Drive, a copy of *Streets Of Rage* and a couple of pads.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

LED STORM

CAPCOM'S ARCADE ARCHIVE IS SO STUFFED THAT FOR EVERY MEGA-HIT THERE ARE SEVERAL RELEASES THAT ARE REGULARLY OVERLOOKED. LED STORM IS ONE SUCH TITLE, AND THAT'S A SHAME BECAUSE IT'S A GREAT GAME – OR SHOULD WE SAY GAMES?

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

» The flyer artwork for the original version looks like something off a pulp sci-fi paperback. That's a good thing.

When covering coin-ops it's common to find different versions of games. Usually the differences between versions are small – a new sprite here, a different tune there. Sometimes they're more significant, with certain stages changed or moved or even dropped. And occasionally the differences are so great that the end result is an almost new game entirely. That's what happened with *LED Storm*.

The original version was subtitled *Rally 2011*, referencing a year that seemed eons away in 1988 when the game was developed. As such the setting was a dystopian future where, presumably due to eternal gridlock in the cities, suspended highways (skyways?) have been constructed high above the congested streets below, enabling drivers to travel at breakneck speeds. But it's not all fine views and fresh air up here. The roads are in poor condition with many obstacles and ruined sections you have to jump over. Worse, they're ruled by angry drivers who either block your way or actively smash into you. Your chief menace however is Robert, an associate who drives the exact same kind of futuristic vehicle as you (yours is red, his is blue). The vague plot points to some kind of wager, where the winner of a nine-stage cross-country race will pocket stacks of cash. Fair enough, but trying to kill your competitor at every opportunity for a pay day? Damn it Rob, that's *not OK*.

Thankfully, your Storm 11 vehicle has a few tricks under its sleek exterior. Firstly, you can push a button to instantly transform it from a car to a bike. The bike is faster but less resilient, but otherwise there's not much difference (morphing between four and two wheels looks cool though). Secondly, and crucially, you can jump at will. This is not just vital for avoiding obstacles, but you can also wipe out other vehicles by landing on them. This evokes memories of Data East's 1982 coin-op

CONVERSION CAPERS

WHICH OF THE HOME CONVERSIONS LED THE WAY?

C64

■ The ever-reliable Ste Ruddy delivers the best home conversion of *LED Storm*. Featuring full-screen graphics and smooth scrolling, combined with a nice parallax effect, this is technically excellent. The gameplay is great too, but it is difficult. Still, you won't mind putting in the practice.

AMSTRAD CPC

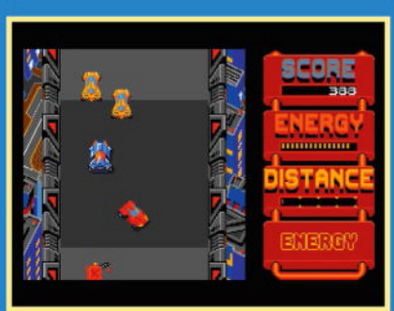
■ Visually this is not far off the C64 version, but it can't match it in the speed or smoothness stakes, and there's no parallax scrolling. The most disappointing thing though is the lack of music. Tim Follin is credited with the audio, but there's no Tim tuneage, just some spot effects.

ZX SPECTRUM

■ It's monochrome, yes, but it's really fast and the parallax effect is one of the best examples on the Spectrum. The only thing that detracts is the horizontal scrolling which lurches from side to side and is somewhat distracting. Tim Follin's music on the 128K version is wonderful.

ATARI ST

■ If only this played as well as it looks. The graphics are faithful to the coin-op, but it suffers from the same jerky horizontal scrolling as the Speccy version – and it doesn't even attempt parallax, which is a shame. The soundtrack saves the day – has the ST ever sounded better?



AMIGA

■ This is an odd one. It's ostensibly the same as the ST version, with the same scrolling issue, but curiously the playing area is actually narrower. We wanted more and got less! Where it does win out is in the audio department. Tim Follin's music sounds punchier than ever.

» The reworked version was retitled *Mad Gear* in some regions and features many changes.

"TIM FOLLIN'S AUDIO WAS AWESOME..."

DEVELOPER Q&A

DAVID BROADHURST ON CONVERTING LED STORM TO 16-BIT COMPUTERS

HOW DID YOU LAND THIS PARTICULAR CONVERSION JOB?
At the time I worked for Software Creations who developed for US Gold. The opportunity to convert *LED Storm* came from US Gold licensing the conversions.

DID YOU HAVE ACCESS TO THE ORIGINAL COIN-OP DURING DEVELOPMENT?
Yes, the arcade machine arrived at our office and the development team's first job was to play the game. We rigged up a 35mm camera to take pictures as we progressed through the game. We never received any assets or documentation from the manufacturer. The game itself was fun and also a little easier than some of the other conversions we did.

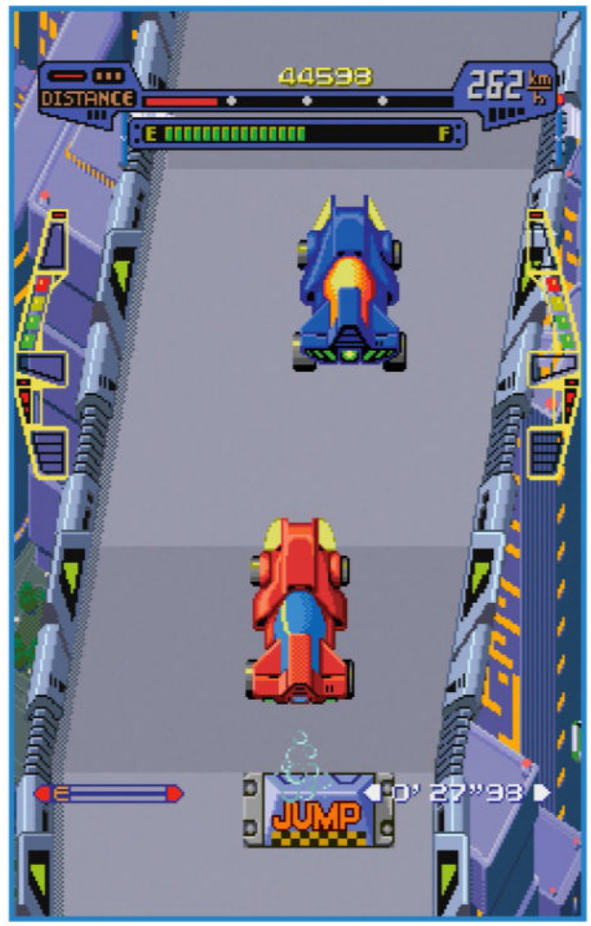
DID YOU KNOW THAT THE HOME CONVERSIONS WERE BASED ON AN EARLY VERSION OF THE COIN-OP THAT CAPCOM LATER CHANGED?
No, that's the first I've heard about this.

THE ORIGINAL ARCADE GAME FEATURED A VERY FAST VERTICAL SCROLL. DID THIS PRESENT YOU WITH PROBLEMS?
Unfortunately, hardware scrolling wasn't supported on the Atari ST. The only way to scroll was brute force by redrawing the entire screen. This is pretty straightforward although slow. The main challenge was to find optimal ways to keep redrawing the screen. Without any hardware support, this was mostly trying to load as many of the CPU registers as possible to copy as many pixels as possible with the fewest machine instructions.

THE ST AND AMIGA VERSIONS ARE VERY SIMILAR. WERE ANY AMIGA ENHANCEMENTS EVER CONSIDERED?
Most conversations in those days considered the Amiga and Atari ST as the same machine. There were no enhancements other than improved audio due to better Amiga hardware. At the time the Amiga version was the best I could build. As I got a better understanding of the Amiga hardware I made games called *Assassin* and *Overdrive* for Team 17. If I was able to remake *LED Storm* after those two it would have technically been a much better game.

THE GAME IS OFTEN REMEMBERED FOR TIM FOLLIN'S MUSIC. YOU MUST HAVE BEEN PLEASED TO HAVE YOUR GAME UNDERSCORED BY SUCH FANTASTIC TUNES?
Yes, it was always great to get audio into a game because it was always done last, so I knew my work was almost done! Tim's audio was awesome but I also got some extra satisfaction because I wrote the audio drivers.

WHILE SOFTWARE CREATIONS WAS WORKING ON *LED STORM*, TIERTEX WAS WORKING ON THE CONVERSION OF *LAST DUEL* FOR US GOLD. WAS THERE ANY RIVALRY THERE?
No rivalry from my perspective. I didn't know Tiertex was working on *Last Duel*. I was too busy working on *LED Storm* that I really wasn't paying attention to what others were doing. Looking back it wouldn't have made any difference to us. Our job was to make the closest version of *LED Storm* we could.



» [Arcade] The red car and the blue car had a race… Robert is your annoying rival in the original *Rally 2011* version.

» [Arcade] Hitting the jumps and soaring over the city far below is an undeniable thrill.

Bump 'N' Jump (aka *Burnin' Rubber*), and in many ways *LED Storm* plays like an opportune update of that old hit.

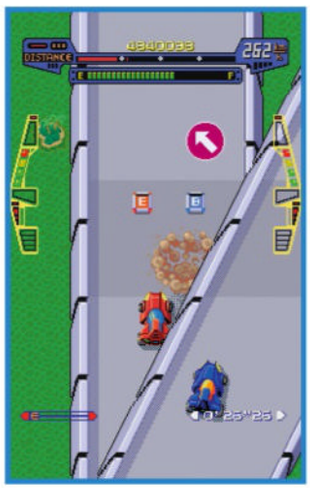
Capcom was clearly onto something and the *Rally 2011* version received a positive reaction from the press. "Capcom sees *LED Storm* as its biggest ever game and its most exciting," wrote Richard Eddy in the August 1988 issue of *The Games Machine*. "It's a mammoth driving combat game across interstellar flyovers. Capcom has put heavy emphasis on the graphics, which are bright, detailed and alien-like." The same issue also previewed *Last Duel*, another vertically scrolling vehicular coin-op from Capcom that shared strong similarities with *LED Storm*. *Last Duel* adopted the subtitle *Inter Planet War 2012*, suggesting that Capcom viewed them as companion pieces. Yet at some point between the game being previewed at shows in late 1988 and receiving a general release in early 1989, all that changed and it was heavily reworked.

Was *LED Storm* too similar to *Last Duel*? Did it perform poorly in location tests? We don't know for sure, but Capcom was concerned enough to ask designer Akira Nishitani (who'd previously worked on *1942* and *Forgotten Worlds*) to oversee the changes. The first thing he did was reel in the sci-fi theme. The Storm 11 car/bike is gone, replaced by a choice of three more standard vehicles: a Formula 1 car, a fancy Porsche and a truck, which all have individual characteristics. The other road users are also less fanciful and it seems the game is now set in the near future rather than the future future (which means MAC, your vehicle's talking computer, has been silenced). Yet weirdly, the stage graphics have not been changed at all, so it still featured those futuristic skyways. Plot-wise, the story now revolves around a high stakes World Race with a $1m bounty for the winner.

Another key difference is the new version is tougher. The courses are shorter on the whole, but they're now littered with obstacles and on some of the later stages it seems there are more gaps in the road than the road itself – and all ramps have been removed, so you need to keep hitting the jump button just to survive. Capcom wasn't shy when it came to chasing credits and the game doesn't disappoint in this regard. Finally the title was changed. In Japan it was renamed *Mad Gear* (which would be the inspiration for the street gang's name in Nishitani's next game, *Final Fight*), while everywhere else it was simply *LED Storm*, without the *Rally 2011* subtitle. And to confuse matters further, if that's possible, there's a separate US release that also bears the *Mad Gear* name.

Reaction to the new *LED Storm*/*Mad Gear* was mixed. Clare Edgeley praised it in *CVG*.

» [Arcade] Your onboard computer MAC is present in both versions, but he only talks in the original release.



» [Arcade] Beating Robert to the finish line earns you a 'plize' of some bonus points.

» [Arcade] In the update, you begin the game lined up against five competitors. Snake in the blue car is the one to watch out for.

» [Arcade] The action is more intense in the reworked version, with extra road users and obstacles to avoid.

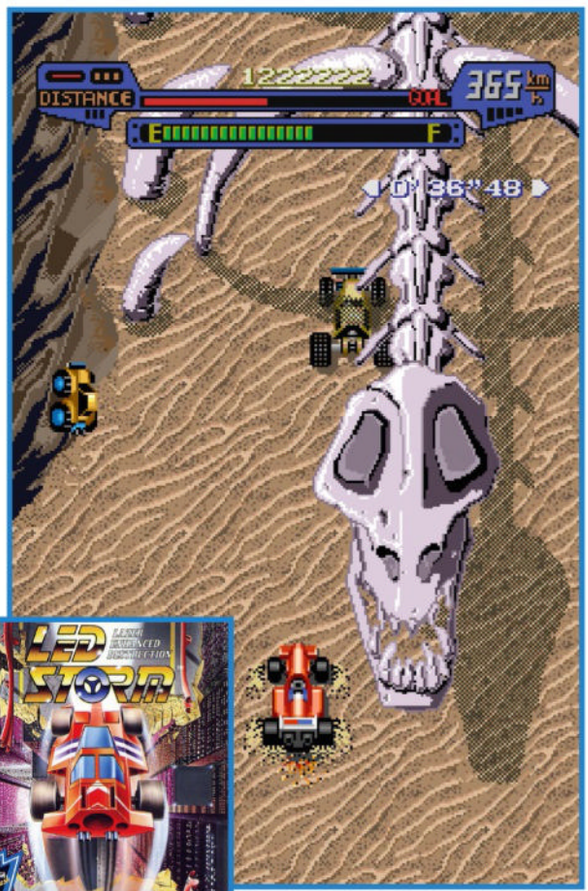
» [Arcade] Sometimes when the road crumbles away, you can jump to an adjacent flyover.

"I really enjoyed it," she wrote in the May 1989 issue. "It makes a great change from the beat-'em-ups and while it's not the ultimate in racing terms, it's great for a joy ride." But Julian 'Jaz' Rignall later roasted it in the same mag. "*LED Storm* is one of the most feeble arcade games of the year. It really isn't very good."

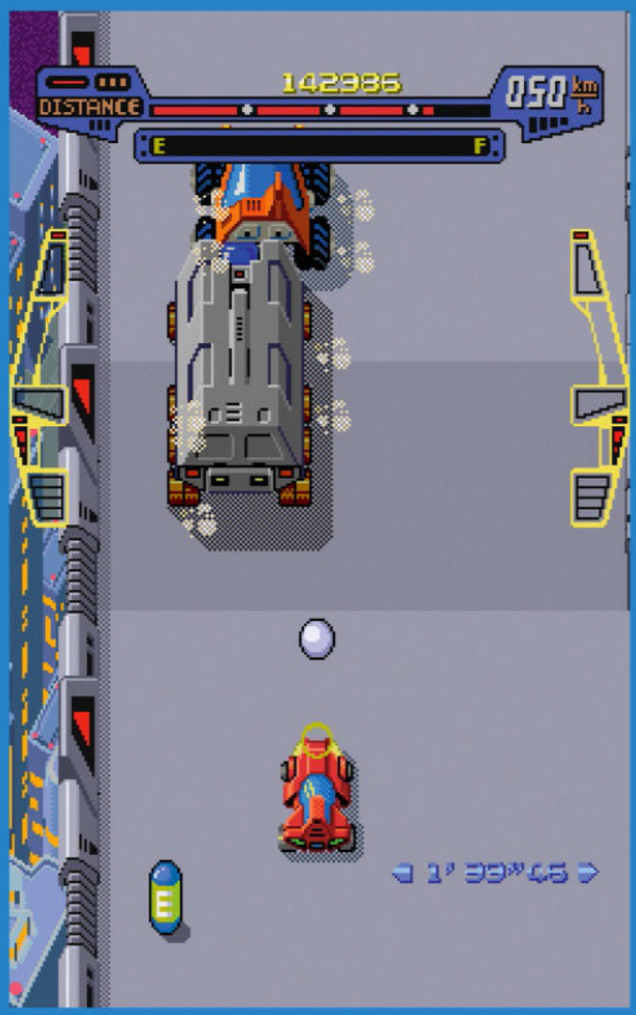
Home conversions were duty-bound as US Gold had previously signed a ten-game deal with Capcom and that included *LED Storm*. The £1.2m deal gave US Gold sight of Capcom's in-development titles, so that the conversions could follow the coin-ops' release dates as closely as possible. With *LED Storm* this led to the interesting situation where the conversion team, Software Creations, was given the *Rally 2011* version to copy, unbeknownst that Capcom would later rework it. For us this is serendipity, as we think the original version is the better game. It's also the reason why when people remember *LED Storm*, they usually recall a futuristic racer and not the version that ended up in the arcades. US Gold converted the game to five home-computer formats, covered elsewhere in this feature. Probably the most memorable thing about the conversions is the audio. On all but the music-free Amstrad CPC version, Software Creations' Tim Follin composed new tunes that are far superior to those featured in the coin-op. In particular, the title tune on the Spectrum 128K, Atari ST and Amiga versions has become a chiptune standard.

Perhaps due to its convoluted history, Capcom has overlooked the game for years. It was not included on any of the various *Capcom Classics* collections (yet *Last Duel* was), nor the later *Capcom Arcade Cabinet*. That finally changed in 2022 with the release of *Capcom Arcade 2nd Stadium*, where it was one of the 32 games included. And which version of *LED Storm* was included, you might wonder? It was the 'shelved' *Rally 2011* version. We'd like to think this is because Capcom preferred the overt sci-fi styling and more balanced difficulty, or it wanted to preserve the creators' original vision, but it's probably due to the use of unlicensed brand names in the released version or something equally dull. Whatever the reason, we have to praise Capcom for finally sharing this deep cut from its arcade archive. ✱

» [C64] The Commodore and Amstrad CPC versions are the only ones that let you transform into the bike, achieved by pulling down and pressing fire.



» [Arcade] Some of the more fantastic elements were carried straight over to the updated version.



LED STORM RISING

PLAYING THE PROTOTYPE THAT WAS GUNNING FOR GLORY

We know there are two distinct versions of *LED Storm*, but it turns out there's actually a third that preceded the others. Known as *Prototype 12*, and supported in MAME since 2018, this is an early take on the *Rally 2011* version that features enough differences to warrant mention.

The main change is that your vehicle (in both car and bike forms) can no longer jump, but it can *shoot*. This radically changes the gameplay, making it more about clearing a path than jumping to avoid other vehicles. Take the large trucks that hog the road at the end of the first stage for example: in the *Rally 2011* version you have to carefully plot a path around them, whereas in the prototype you can just blow 'em out the way. It's still possible to jump, but only by hitting a ramp or popping a wheelie and hitting the sloped sides of the road. Our guess is that the shooting was dropped to distinguish it more from the very similar *Last Duel*.

» PUSHING THE LIMITS

Street Fighter II: Champion Edition

How NEC's tiny console successfully pulled off the task of hosting the world's biggest fighting game

» **PLATFORM:** PC ENGINE » **RELEASED:** 1993 » **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM

Given the coin-op success of *Street Fighter II,* it's no surprise that Capcom wanted to get the one-on-one fighter into homes, and the SNES and Mega Drive were obvious destinations for conversions because of their huge international audiences. The PC Engine wasn't quite as natural a fit, but it made some sense too. Even though the machine was already over five years old and had only achieved mainstream success in Japan, it still had an audience worth tapping into – and with the support of platform holder NEC as a publisher, it wasn't a risky business for Capcom.

The PC Engine had previously hosted a conversion of the original *Street Fighter*, bizarrely retitled as *Fighting Street*, as a launch game for its new CD-ROM add-on in 1988. By 1993, Super CD-ROM releases dominated the PC Engine release schedule and the HuCard format was in decline, but the two companies decided that *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition* would come on a HuCard, ensuring that every PC Engine owner could enjoy it.

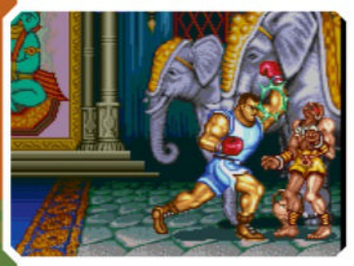
Sticking to the HuCard meant that the PC Engine version of *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition* would suffer musically compared to other home versions. The system's single background layer also cost it some parallax scrolling, but in terms of colour and detail the PC Engine put in a great showing against its contemporaries – and of course the gameplay was excellent, although a six-button pad was needed to get the best of it.

It should come as no surprise that the game was a success, and because of that it can be found for as little as £20 boxed with manual today. There's no particular reason to choose it over any other conversion today, but rest assured that if you do play it, you'll be seeing the PC Engine performing at the peak of its powers.

HOW IT PUSHED THE LIMITS...

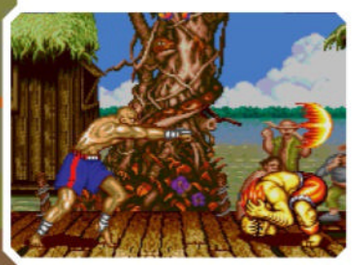
Roomy ROM

At 20 megabits, *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition* is the largest HuCard release. That's two-and-a-half times more than the next-biggest game, and the format's theoretical capacity limit.



Captivating Colour

Thanks to the console's large colour palette and artistic skill, the PC Engine exceeds the Mega Drive version in simultaneous colours on-screen and often comes close to the SNES version.



Varied Voices

The grunts, shouts and celebrations of the fighters are crucial to the *Street Fighter II* experience, and the PC Engine game not only includes them, but reproduces them all rather faithfully.

Portable Power

The game's HuCard release meant that if you had a PC Engine GT and you were willing to put up with some control compromises, you could enjoy an authentic *Street Fighter II* experience anywhere.

THE RETRO GAMER GUIDE TO

GRADIUS

JOIN RETRO GAMER AS WE CELEBRATE ONE OF KONAMI'S LONGEST-RUNNING FRANCHISES. PREPARE TO SHOOT THE CORE AND REVISIT A HOST OF ROCK-HARD SHMUPS

WORDS BY DARRAN JONES

Konami, like many other developers with its roots in the arcades, is no stranger to shmups. It jumped on the *Space Invaders* wagon in 1978 with *Space King* and continued to dabble in the genre for years to come.

Gradius (or *Nemesis* as it's also known in various parts of the world) is by far its most successful shooting series and has given us such catchphrases as, "Shoot the core!" as well as several spin-off franchises (which we'll also be including here). We can't discuss *Gradius* however without briefly mentioning Konami's rather excellent 1981 shooter *Scramble*. Originally seen as a standalone game, the release of *Gradius Advance* and *Gradius V* retrofitted the game to be the first title in the *Gradius* series. This makes sense as Konami's developers once revealed that *Gradius* had the working title of *Scramble 2* during development. Sadly, the connection now remains rather tenuous.

Five years later, Konami released an official book, *Gradius Portable Official Guide*, which shunted *Scramble* out of the limelight and included it as part of Konami's *Shooting History* series instead. Then, in 2019, *Anniversary Collection: Arcade Classics* suggested it *could* be considered the start of the series in its accompanying e-book. It's all very confusing. Confusion aside, *Gradius* remains one of Konami's most enduring franchises, even if the last physical standalone console game was all the way back in 2004. Here's hoping the series hasn't been forgotten for good.

GRADIUS 1985

ARCADE, VARIOUS

■ While its influence isn't as far-reaching as many think (few games outside Konami's own adopted its novel power-up feature) *Gradius* certainly made a huge impact on its later games and spin-offs. Downed enemies drop icons that will either destroy all enemies on the screen or light-up a power bar. Once the desired weapon is highlighted it can be activated, making your ship, the Vic Viper, that little more powerful. It's an elegant system that also adds a surprising layer of strategy to proceedings. Its arcade success also led to numerous ports. Notable examples are a new level for the MSX game and the legendary Konami Code found in the NES version. Oh, and the term "Shoot the core!" comes from the announcement at the beginning of every boss fight.

NEMESIS 2 1987

MSX

■ The big change to the standard *Gradius* formula is your ship's ability to add additional weapons to its core arsenal. This is done by destroying a boss and flying into its core (you'll earn two weapons if you defeat it in 15 seconds or one within 16-30 seconds). It also adds secret stages, a dazzling array of new weapons and power-ups, a brand-new ship called the Metalion and a cool new feature where you have to play back through the earlier stages in reverse order to reach stage 0.

LIFE FORCE 1987

ARCADE, VARIOUS

■ This is kind of just *Salamander*, but there are a number of slight gameplay differences that means it plays very differently. Actually, that's a lie, there's just one big difference and that is that it uses exactly the same power-up system found in *Gradius*. The game has also had its visuals altered and adds new sound so that you're now flying through someone's body instead of deep space. Confusingly, the US release of *Life Force* (shown here) does use the same power-up system found in the original *Salamander*.

SALAMANDER 1986

ARCADE, VARIOUS

■ It's a spin-off, sure, but that doesn't mean this ace shooter isn't worth covering. The biggest change is its two-player co-operative gameplay, which introduces the new ship Lord British. And while we're on the subject of huge changes, lets mention the fact that *Salamander* features stages which scroll horizontally as well as vertically, something which was quite a big deal and rarely seen at the time. Unlike with *Gradius*, power-ups are immediately gained by picking up capsules, and you now immediately continue upon dying (*Gradius* would send you back to a predefined checkpoint) which makes things that little bit easier. There are new weapons, including the excellent Ripple Laser (which would cross over into later *Gradius* games) and it's set in the same universe as *Gradius* (taking place in the year 6709).

VULCAN VENTURE 1988

ARCADE, PC ENGINE CD, SHARP X68000

Remember when we mentioned how the Ripple Laser would feature in later *Gradius* games? Well this is where it started. Other *Salamander* weapons made it across too – in fact, there are now four different weapon configurations and progressions to choose from. You can also now select between the traditional Front Shield of *Gradius* and *Salamander*'s Force Field. These extra configurations are useful as *Vulcan Venture* (*Gradius II: Gofer No Yabou* in Japan) is incredibly frustrating, with tricky enemy waves and some brutally tough bosses to defeat. If it wasn't tough enough already, it also adds the Boss Rush and a new Speed Stage where the game scrolls faster than usual and forces the Vic Viper to squeeze through increasingly narrower corridors. Grrrrr.

PARODIUS 1988

MSX

Konami's playful parody of *Gradius* started off life on the MSX (a Japanese computer Konami were staunch defenders of). While it predominantly takes cheerful sideswipes at *Gradius*, the *Parodius* games aren't afraid to make fun of other classic Konami games too, including *Antarctic Adventure*, *Castlevania*, *Twinbee* and many others. Also known as *Parodius: The Octopus Saves The Earth*, this Japanese exclusive is extremely similar to *Gradius* from a gameplay point of view, so it features the same power-up system.

The key difference however is the introduction of a new roulette mechanic that requires the player to press a button to stop it and can give a negative effect. Like *Gradius II* it also features different selectable power-up progressions, but they are now tied to specific characters, including the penguin found in Hideo Kojima's *Antarctic Adventure*, an Octopus, a cute version of the Vic Viper and several other characters. It's far livelier than earlier *Gradius* games too, with a focus on bright colours and cute penguins.

NEMESIS 3: THE EVE OF DESTRUCTION 1988

MSX

Piling on the name confusion surrounding the *Gradius* series, this is known as *Nemesis 3: The Eve Of Destruction* in Europe and *Salamander II* in Korea. It's actually a spin-off of *Gradius II* and has an extremely complicated plot that would be literally impossible to recount with the space that we have. We will however, mention that it retains many of the weapons first featured in *Nemesis 2* and adds several new ones. This time though, instead of quickly defeating bosses to earn them, you have to find where they've been hidden in the stage instead. Oh, and it's probably one of the hardest games in the series, so make sure you go in prepared.

"GRADIUS III IS ALSO INFAMOUS FOR A RATHER RUBBISH PSEUDO 3D LEVEL, FOUND ON STAGE FOUR"

GRADIUS III 1989

ARCADE, SNES

The insane difficulty of *Gradius III* makes earlier games seem like a pleasant stroll through Disney Land. In fact, the Japanese version actually features a Beginner Mode that includes the first three levels of the game. If the high difficulty wasn't a big enough issue, *Gradius III* is also infamous for a rather rubbish pseudo 3D level, found on stage four, which is devoid of enemies and simply has you flying into the screen and grabbing as many power-ups as possible. Thankfully, this rather disappointing stage was removed from the SNES conversion, which was the only port at the time.

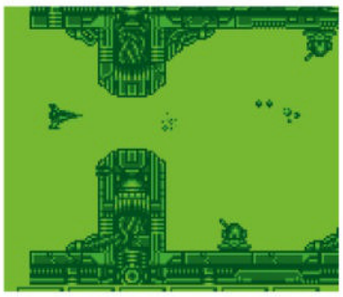
While it is rather difficult, some of the stress of playing *Gradius III* can be offset by using its rather clever Edit Mode. In addition to using the typical pre-defined weapons, it's also possible to interchange several weapons into new configurations. The game was re-released in 2000 alongside *Gradius IV* on PS2 and features an additional Extra Edit Mode.

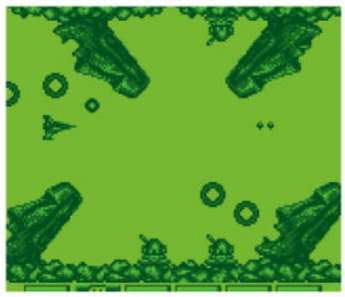
PARODIUS DA! 1990

ARCADE, VARIOUS

Due to the obscurity of the MSX, many believe this to be the first game in the *Parodius* series. It actually has fewer characters than the original *Parodius*, simply including, Tako The Octopus, Pentarou The Penguin, Twinbee and Vic Viper. The key difference though, is that each character has a unique configuration based on a particular game, so Tako is based on *Salamander*, Pentarou on *Gradius II*, Twinbee uses *Twinbee* and Vic Viper has a traditional *Gradius* configuration.

The other main difference is the introduction of Bells, which act as one-use power-ups. Depending on their colour, they can take the form of smart bombs, allow your character to grow in size, or even add a megaphone that spouts various phrases that can kill incoming enemies. It features far better visuals than in the MSX game and the wacky adaptations of classic tunes sound even better. It also includes numerous scantily clad ladies that typically act as bosses or barriers (one early stage sees you flying between the legs of a can-can dancer). There were numerous ports, many of which were of a very high standard.





NEMESIS 1990

GAME BOY

The Game Boy was an incredibly popular handheld so it should come as no surprise to learn that several *Gradius* games appeared on it. What is surprising though is just how good the first one is, easily being on par with the excellent Game Boy port of *R-Type*. While it features similar elements to the original *Gradius* game, all the actual levels are completely new and not found in previous games. The biggest bonus is that it's now possible to choose which level you start on and you can also change the number of lives you start with – amazingly, all the way up to 99. *Nemesis* is rather refreshing in that it also introduces a large number of new bosses, many of which are surprisingly well detailed and look pleasingly intimidating on the Game Boy's tiny screen. It's a solid shooter that was eventually re-released as part of Konami's first *Konami GB Collection*.

NEMESIS II: RETURN OF THE HERO 1991

GAME BOY

Here's yet another game that goes by multiple names. It's known as *Nemesis II: Return Of The Hero* in Japan and Europe and *Gradius: The Interstellar Assault* in the US. Despite its name, it shares very few of the staples that are found in many other *Gradius* games. It features none of the classic *Gradius* music, many of the core stages aren't included and there are no Moai enemies either. There are similarities, of course, including the evergreen Vic Viper and the traditional power-up bar and core bosses, but it feels quite divorced from the main series at times. Despite this estrangement, it's another solid addition and another cracking Game Boy shooter. It starts off with an excellent stage that has you being chased by a gigantic boss and doesn't really let up from there. The graphics have been significantly enhanced over the original Game Boy game, while the music also sounds far punchier than before. Like *Nemesis* before it, it was later ported to another *Konami GB Collection*.

JIKKYO OSHABERI PARODIUS 1995

SNES, PLAYSTATION, SATURN

Although the two previous *Parodius* games started off life in arcades, *Jikkyo Oshaberi Parodius* began on Nintendo's 16-bit Super Famicom, as a Japanese exclusive. Its name translates as *Chatting Parodius Live*, a title that becomes more obvious as you hear the huge amounts of Japanese voice samples that punctuate the game.

While previous *Parodius* games took subtle swipes at earlier Konami games, it's more obvious here, with levels based on *Twinbee*, *XEXEX* and *Lethal Enforcers*. It also features a huge number of playable characters, while hidden fairies unlock crazy cheats. It was updated for the Saturn and PlayStation in 1996 as *Parodius Forever With Me* and included numerous extras.

MORE TO LOOK OUT FOR

- NEMESIS 90 KAI (1993) SHARP X68000
- GOKUJO PARODIUS! (1994) VARIOUS
- PARO WARS (1997) PLAYSTATION
- SOLAR ASSAULT/SOLAR ASSAULT REVISED (1997) ARCADE
- GRADIUS IV (1998) ARCADE, PS2
- GRADIUS NEO (2004) MOBILE
- GRADIUS NEO IMPERIAL (2004) MOBILE
- OTOMEDIUS (2007) ARCADE
- GRADIUS ARC (2009) MOBILE

SALAMANDER 2 1996

ARCADE, SATURN, PLAYSTATION

Salamander's true sequel is an aesthetic delight thanks to Konami mixing pre-rendered CGI and beautiful 2D sprites together. It has a truly stunning soundtrack, too, building on the brilliant tunes found in the original game. In terms of gameplay enhancements, only a few new ones are added, but they're fairly decent all the same. Several new weapons appear, including a Twin Laser, and weapons can now be upgraded. It's also possible to sacrifice an Option to create a significantly powerful attack. There are only two overhead stages this time around, and the difficulty level is a little high, but it remains an excellent little blaster all the same.

SEXY PARODIUS 1996

ARCADE, SATURN, PLAYSTATION

Many deem this to be the best *Parodius* game and it's hard to argue otherwise. It takes the silly wackiness to a whole new level, has sensational-looking visuals and some wonderfully catchy tunes. It also includes new mission-based gameplay. Collect a set number of coins and destroy a certain amount of enemies and you'll complete the stage as normal, fail and you'll have an all new stage to complete.

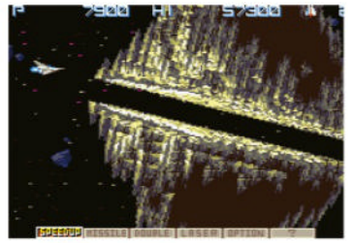
GRADIUS GAIDEN 1997

PLAYSTATION

Gradius Gaiden remains one of the best games in the series, only being beaten by Treasure's later effort. Everything about it, from its delightful soundtrack to its striking visuals is superb, and an incredible amount of effort has gone into its level design.

The second stage consists of an old graveyard, full of bosses from previous games in the series, while another stage takes place in a crystal cavern that reflects your ship's lasers. The bosses are equally imaginative and are often huge in scope, making *Gaiden* a true tour de force. They're also quite formiddable, with interesting attack patterns that can take a while to master.

While its weapon selection isn't quite as strong as previous games in the series, it's far better balanced and introduces a simultaneous two-player mode that makes survival far easier when compared to other *Gradius* games. Although it started off life confined to Japan on its original release, it was eventually released as part of the PSP's *Gradius Collection* with four other games: *Gradius, Gradius II: Gofer No Yabo, Gradius III* and *Gradius IV.*



GRADIUS ADVANCE 2001

GBA

Known as *Gradius Galaxies* in America and *Gradius Generations* in Japan, this is the only game in the series to be released on the Game Boy Advance.

It's a classic *Gradius* game, with all the key tropes from the series as well as some exceptionally well-detailed sprite design and great-looking bosses. There are four different types of weapon configurations to choose from – one of which is based on *Salamander* – and it's possible to have the computer select power-ups for you. While the brutally tough Challenge Mode is only found in the later Japanese release, all three versions let you resume the game from any completed stages. Its plot is set between *Gradius III* and *Gradius Gaiden.*

UP, UP, DOWN, DOWN, LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT, RIGHT, B, A, START

The many uses of the Konami Code

GRADIUS

SYSTEM: NES

This powerful cheat activates all power-ups in the game with the exception of Speed-Up, Double and Laser. That should make things easier.

GRADIUS

SYSTEM: PC ENGINE

Finding the PC Engine port of *Gradius* too tough? Enter the Konami Code to receive full Options, the Shield and Missiles. You can thank us later.

LIFE FORCE

SYSTEM: NES

Enter the infamous code on the title screen and you'll be rewarded with 30 lives. Be warned, it doesn't work on all versions of the game.

GRADIUS II

SYSTEM: PC ENGINE

If you pause the game and enter the code you'll receive full power. You can use it multiple times when playing on Easy mode, if Normal is too difficult.

GRADIUS III

SYSTEM: SNES

This is a sneaky one. You receive all power-ups but instantly die upon pausing the game. Use the L and R triggers to get around this problem.

GRADIUS V 2004

PLAYSTATION 2

This is not only the best *Gradius* game in the series, but quite possibly one of the best horizontal shooters to have ever been released. Created by the talented team at Treasure it's a truly wonderful game that takes the odd idea from *Salamander* (your Options now disperse when you die, allowing you to re-catch them) but also adds many of its own. By far the most innovative is the new control you have over Multiples (Options): in previous games they trailed behind you, roughly following your movement, but now you have direct control over them, with different configurations available depending on which initial setup you choose. As with *Gradius Gaiden*, *Gradius V* once again features simultaneous co-operative play, handy, as it presents a rather stiff challenge.

OTOMEDIUS GORGEOUS 2008

XBOX 360

The original *Otomedius* was released in 2007 and was Konami's first arcade shooter in eight years. Effectively a spin-off of *Gradius* it features a touch-screen interface and also worked with an e-AMUSEMENT Pass. The Xbox 360 port debuted a year later and was released alongside a special Hori controller that replicated the original arcade controls. It also featured additional characters along with a new VS Mission and Gorgeous Mode. Both versions of the game allow for simultaneous three-player action.

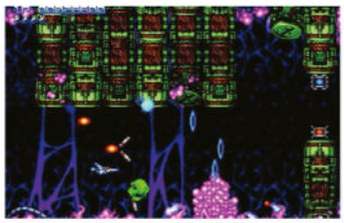
GRADIUS REBIRTH 2008

WII

M2 is best-known for its emulation work, but it has also made a small number of original games. Some of its most popular are its three *ReBirth* titles commissioned by Konami which focussed on *Castlevania*, *Gradius* and *Contra*. Needless to say, we're featuring the *Gradius* update here.

In many ways *ReBirth* can be best described as a remix of the earlier *Gradius* games and as a result it feels delightful old-school. In fact it uses the early MSX games as a point of reference, while much of the music is remixed from other *Gradius* games. Sadly, it dispenses with the multiplayer action of *Gaiden* and *Gradius V* and once again ups the difficulty level. Thankfully, this is offset somewhat by the standard game mode having unlimited continues. A second mode, Score Attack gives you a single credit but allows for online leaderboards.

Aesthetically resembling *Gradius Gaiden*, *ReBirth* is a solid shooter and the last true *Gradius* game on a home console. Here's hoping we don't have to wait too long for a new one.



OTOMEDIUS EXCELLENT 2011

XBOX 360

Otomedius Excellent was never released in arcades. It's more of the same if we're honest, although the visuals have been greatly improved and there are plenty of new characters and stages in the form of downloadable content. Interestingly, Koji Igarashi, who is most famous for his contributions to *Castlevania*, was its producer.

NEMESIS

SYSTEM: GAME BOY

This one's handy, and has no negatives. Pause the game, enter the code, and you'll have access to a full set of Options, lasers and a Force Shield.

GRADIUS DELUXE PACK

SYSTEM: SATURN

If you use the Konami Code you'll get access to all weapons. It only works on Saturn Easy and Saturn Hard though.

GRADIUS IV FUKKATSU

SYSTEM: PS2

Not enjoying the fourth game on PS2? Enter the code to receive all power-ups with the exception of Speed-Up and Double.

PARODIUS

SYSTEM: GAME BOY

If you enter the code when the Konami logo appears you'll get a sound test. Use it to receive all power-ups except Speed-Up and Double.

GRADIUS GALAXIES

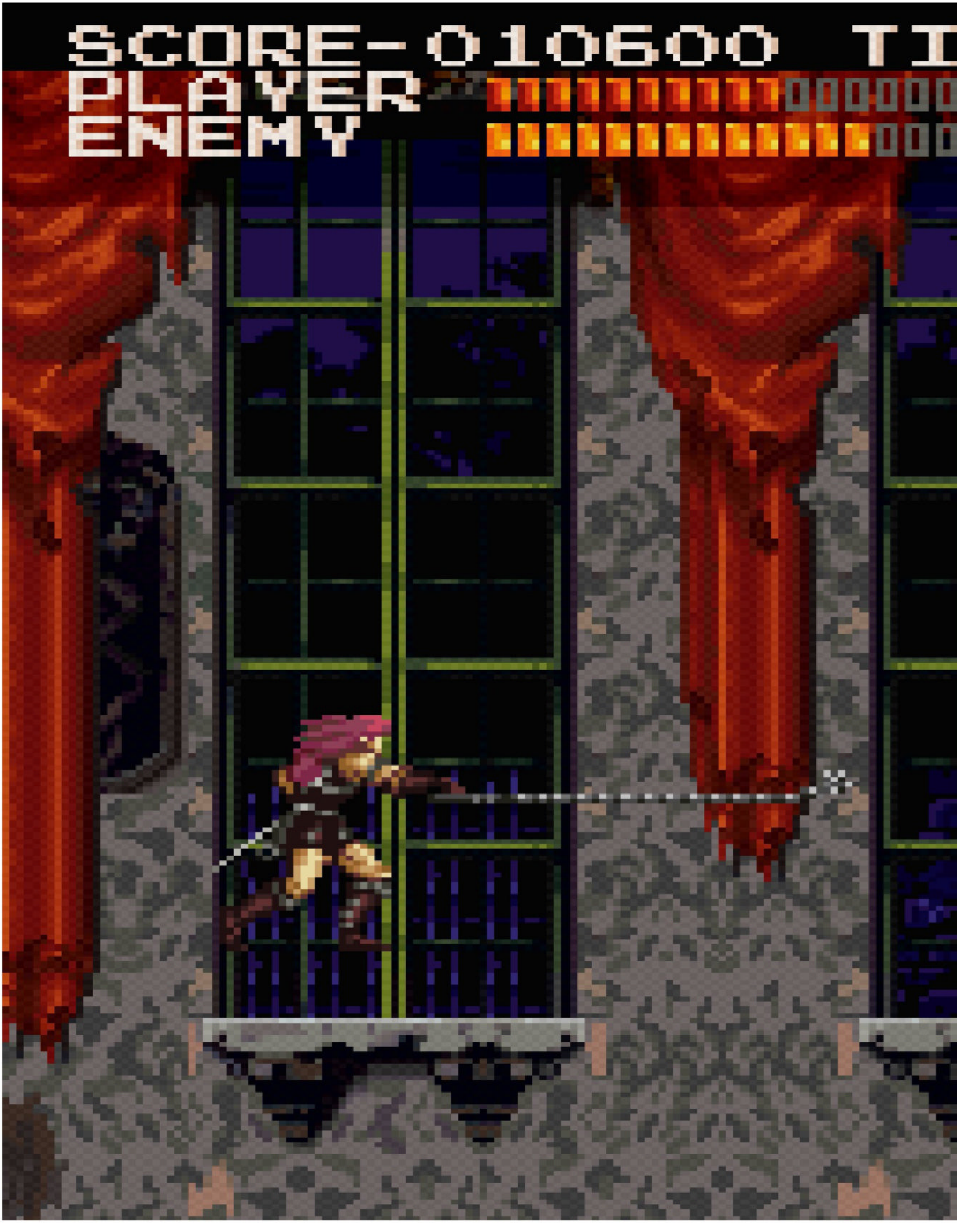
SYSTEM: GBA

Like Gradius III on SNES, you have to substitute the L and R triggers or you'll instantly die upon unpausing the game.

GRADIUS V

SYSTEM: PS2

It's the normal code but substitute B and A for L1 and R1. You'll receive full power-ups. Use L2 and RR2 to receive the Double Shot instead.


SCORE-010600 TI
PLAYER
ENEMY

Castlevania Chronicles

NOT AS SCARY AS THE PRICE

» PLAYSTATION » 2001 » KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT TOKYO

After going to the London Gaming Market and clearing out a large number of games, I decided to start investigating the library of Sony's original PlayStation and grabbed a few titles I couldn't typically justify buying. One of those games was *Castlevania Chronicles*, essentially an upgrade of a Sharp X68000 game, which in turn was an update of *Castlevania* on the NES.

After a little umming and ahhing I grabbed a Japanese copy for £90, which is expensive, but a darn sight cheaper than the US version, even if it does have a few bugs and lacks a couple of extras from that later edition. Still, what a great little game it is. In addition to including the X68000 game in all its brutal glory, it also includes a new Arranged version which I'm sharing here.

As well as greatly improved visuals and audio, the Arranged version has also adjusted the game's difficulty, because the X68000 version can be quite a slog to get through. One of the biggest benefits is that your protagonist, Simon Belmont, no longer gets knocked back upon taking a hit, which makes certain sections of the game far easier to complete than they were in the X68000 outing.

I don't think I originally completed *Castlevania* on the NES originally, coming to it long after it initially came out, but it's been great to return to it in this new enhanced form. Despite its far simpler visuals, that NES version always felt epic in scope, but its numerous bosses and locations are suitably enhanced here, making the adventure feel far richer as a result.

I've not completed *Castlevania Chronicles* at the time of writing, but rest assured it will be finished by the time you read this. And if you fancy trying out Konami's game for yourself, make sure you save your cash and pick up the digital version available on the PS3. It's much easier on the wallet.

THE MAKING OF Callahan's CROSSTIME SALOON

YOU'LL ENTER IT AS A STRANGER, AND YOU'LL LEAVE AS A FRIEND. JOIN ADVENTURE GAMING LEGEND JOSH MANDEL FOR A BEER OR TWO IN CALLAHAN'S CROSSTIME SALOON: A HILARIOUS, UNSUNG CLASSIC FROM THE LATER YEARS OF THE POINT-AND-CLICK ERA'S GOLDEN AGE...

WORDS BY GEM WHEELER

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** TAKE-TWO INTERACTIVE
- **DEVELOPER:** LEGEND ENTERTAINMENT
- **RELEASED:** 1997
- **PLATFORM:** PC
- **GENRE:** GRAPHIC ADVENTURE

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SPELLCASTING 101: SORCERERS GET ALL THE GIRLS
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1990

ERIC THE UNREADY (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1993

DEATH GATE
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 1994

Ever wished for a community of friends you could always rely on for laughter, camaraderie, adventures across time and space and several universes' worth of puns? Welcome to *Callahan's Crosstime Saloon*. Josh Mandel's point-and-click adventure for Legend Entertainment might not have received the acclaim it deserved on its release in 1997, but it has since won a well-deserved cult following for its humour and warmth.

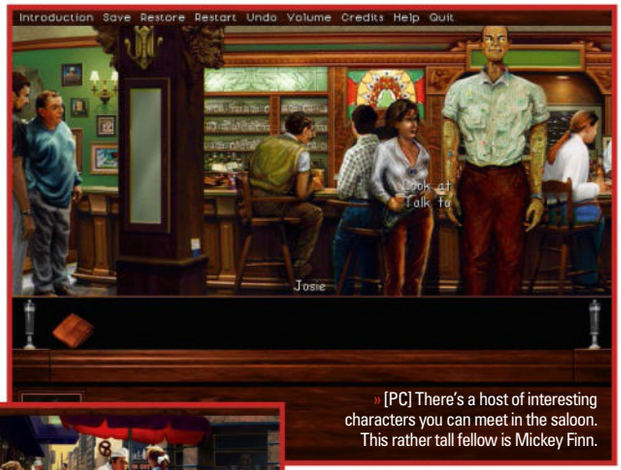
Josh – one of Sierra On-Line's leading lights before his departure after changes at the top robbed the adventure game powerhouse of its creative verve – had been a big fan of sci-fi author Spider Robinson's stories about Mike Callahan and his loveable set of barflies for a while when the opportunity to develop the game arose. Even so, in some distant universe where computer games' cultural cachet has always been more on a par with *Citizen Kane* than *Duke Nukem*, this article's about a title based on David Eddings' epic fantasy, *The Belgariad*.

"Apparently, or so I'm told, David Eddings, did no more than glance at the design, if that, and said, 'I don't want a lot of teenagers running and jumping and punching their way through my universe,'" Josh says. "It seemed pretty clear that Eddings' concept of computer games had been formed mostly by exposure to console games like *Super Mario Bros* and *Castlevania* and games like that, and that he was unfamiliar with 'adventure gaming' or CRPGs. He apparently had no interest in investigating further, and Random House really didn't want to press the issue with him. So (Legend's founders) Mike (Verdu) and Bob (Bates) came back to me and said, '*Belgariad*'s DOA. So give us the names of two authors whose work you would be interested in adapting some way into a game.' I gave it a little thought and said, 'Dean Koontz,' (whose books I was very much into at the time) and, 'Spider Robinson.' Shortly thereafter, for whatever reason – perhaps having to do with Random House's author relationships – they said, 'Spider Robinson it is.' And that's how the *Callahan's* game got started."

Interestingly, Robinson's involvement in the game based on his creation was limited, as Josh explains. "It struck me as odd how disconnected Spider originally was with the fact that I was going to adapt his stories into a game. I spoke with him on the phone – he lives in Canada – and he said, 'As long as the cheque clears, that's all I really care about.' But I wasn't really comfortable with that. So once I had a selection of stories that I thought would make good short adventures, based in part on

» Josh Mandel, creator of another brilliant, unsung adventure – *Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist* – went on to create games for Legend Entertainment and Replay Games after leaving legendary developer, Sierra On-Line.

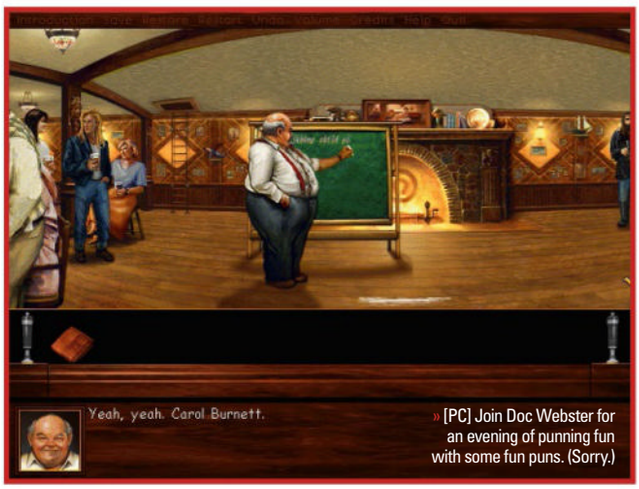
> *"The Callahan's vibe, its message, was so positive and uplifting that I thought there'd be nothing else like it on the market, and a game based on it might actually do some good for people"*
>
> **Josh Mandel**



» [PC] There's a host of interesting characters you can meet in the saloon. This rather tall fellow is Mickey Finn.

» [PC] The biplane isn't the safest way to travel, which you can use to your advantage.

» [PC] New York, New York – Jake gets to explore a corporate corner of the Big Apple.



» [PC] Join Doc Webster for an evening of punning fun with some fun puns. (Sorry.)

his existing characters and in part on my own ideas, I felt strongly that he should have a say in it, so I sent it to him. He sent me back an email saying that there was only one of the story ideas he vetoed: an origin story for Doc Webster, one of the main crew at the bar. And his objection was not to the details of the story itself, but rather that he was just then working on a Doc Webster origin story himself, so naturally he didn't want me to conflict with what he was creating as new canon. After that, I just went to work and didn't involve Spider for a long time, just the occasional check-in to let him know how things were going and to pass along any particular puns I'd come up with that I thought he'd especially appreciate. The entry on the game in Wikipedia is wrong on this count; Spider and I spoke very infrequently during the vast majority of development."

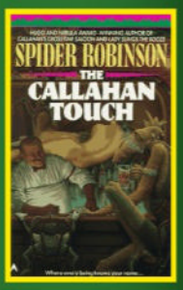
Robinson, also a musician and songwriter, was more enthusiastic when asked to record five songs for the game alongside blues musician Amos Garrett, "One of his idols", as Josh notes. Still, *Callahan's* is keeping one secret that Josh is reluctant to part with. "Most of the music, however, was written by someone who… well, I'm not sure if I should say his name, because he was working for another company at the time and worked on CCS under an assumed name. But it's someone well-known to and worshipped by the adventure gaming community."

The music's not the only auditory pleasure to be found in *Callahan's*. Josh is delighted with the voice acting, performed by actors cast by Kathleen Bober with some input from Josh himself. "I thought Jake Stonebender's voice (Jeff Baker) was absolutely ideal – it sounded scruffy, as Jake should be. And Mike Callahan's voice (Jim Lawless) was also superb, warm yet authoritative. It reminded me of Bruce McGill, the actor who played to perfection the bartender in the final episode of the original *Quantum Leap*."

Josh's punning wit is given free rein in *Callahan's Crosstime Saloon*, and players will have a lot of fun scratching their heads over Doc Webster's Punday Night contest. That said, Josh isn't totally satisfied with the finished product. "In retrospect, I wish I could go back and do an edit on some of the jokes that just didn't land, but the game was published wholly unexpectedly – I wasn't even in the country at that moment – so I didn't

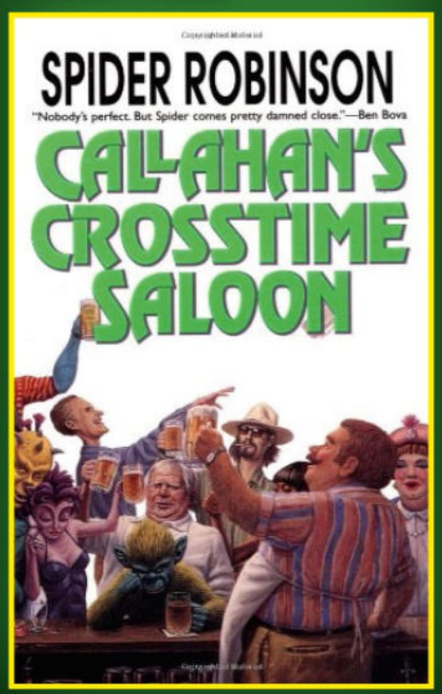
Callahan's Place

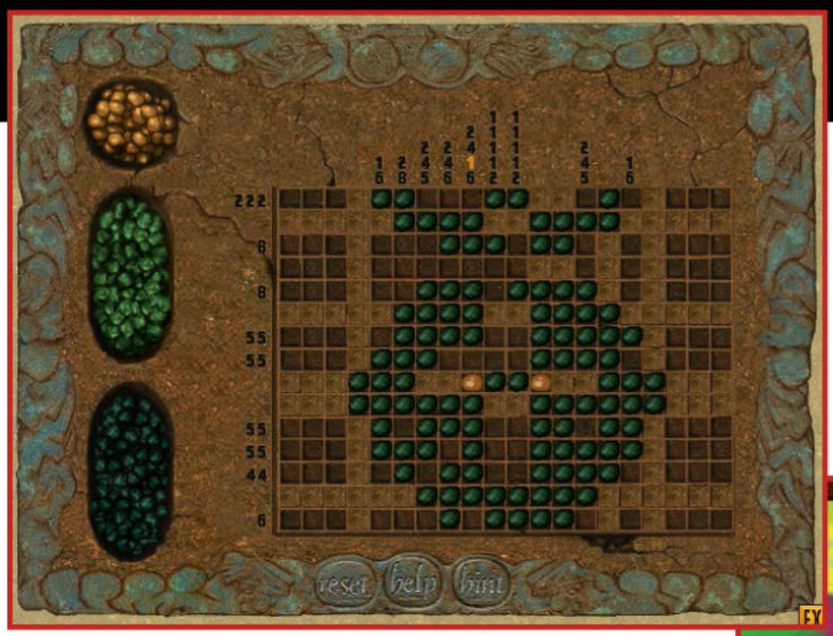
DELVING INTO SPIDER ROBINSON'S ORIGINAL CALLAHAN'S STORIES



Spider Robinson's cult sci-fi series centred on the bar, Callahan's Place, appeared in nine short-story collections and novels between 1977 and 2003. Josh first encountered barkeeper Mike Callahan and his regulars in an airport: just the place to begin an adventure, in fact. "They had one of the *Callahan's* paperbacks on the rack of books in the little airport store, and it sounded intriguing. I read it from cover to cover during the flight and enjoyed it immensely."

The *Callahan's* spirit of friendship, hope and camaraderie held huge appeal for Josh, as he explains. "At that time, I don't think I gave any thought to turning it into a game. But when things worked out as they did at Legend, and the opportunity presented itself, I thought of what an incredible change from the vast majority of adventure games at the time this would be. The adventure games being released at the time seemed to be almost all dystopian or horror or otherwise darkly themed. The *Callahan's* vibe, its message, was so positive and uplifting that I thought there'd be nothing else like it on the market, and a game based on it might actually do some good for people."





» [PC] Use coloured stones to solve an ancient puzzle in the Brazilian rainforest.

» [PC] In space, no-one can hear you voice regret that you forgot to mention something important.

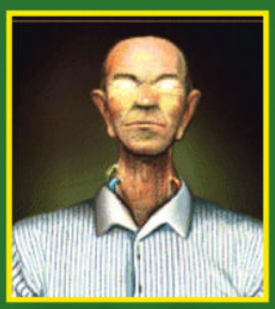
» [PC] Mike's bar stands apart from the busy road – a safe haven for all.

Callahan's Cast

MEET SOME OF MIKE CALLAHAN'S REGULARS

Josie

Josie Bauer is a time cop with a taste for chocolate. Her big adventure takes you to corporate NYC and deep into the Brazilian rainforest on a rickety biplane. She has a thing for men who win Doc Webster's pun contest, so get quizzing, Jake…

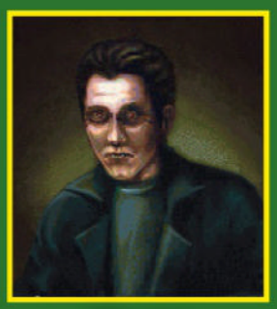


Mickey Finn

Mickey Finn (real name unpronounceable by humans) is a seven-foot-tall cyborg who arrives in Callahan's on a mission. His goal: the invasion of Earth by an alien race. Luckily for us, the Callahan's crew convinced him that we might just be worth sparing.

Noah

Noah is a cop and bomb-disposal expert who accompanies you into space in a quest to destroy a satellite that is saturating Earth with testosterone-blasting energy. Take flight in Squish The Alien's flying saucer to save our world from extraterrestrial danger.



Pyotr

Pyotr is a melancholy vampire with a broken heart. (Not to worry: no stakes were involved at any point.) Track him back to his Romanian homeland to help him reconcile with his lost love, Sasha, while meeting a host of supernatural creatures along the way.

Al Phee

Al Phee is a time-travelling con man, but when he tells Jake that he's been assailed by mind-reading powers while visiting the future, it's the truth. Put him out of his misery for a bit while you head forwards in time to clean up the mess.

have an opportunity to do that. I love a rich set of responses, as I'd learned to take for granted when playing Infocom games, but it's harder to do that in a point-and-click game. And there comes a point where you have to say, 'This isn't working, cut this.' I thought I'd get the time to do that."

In the guise of series protagonist, Jake Stonebender – a widower who came to Callahan's wracked by guilt he feels for the death of his wife and their little girl in a car crash – you'll play through five distinct quests, followed by one final mission to save our universe from deadly alien bureaucracy. From outer space to a future dystopia via a deliciously eerie Transylvania, the game isn't short on variety. Its designer, however, is clear on his personal favourite.

"I think the Chocolate Story, Josie's adventure, is nearest and dearest to my heart. As a kid, one of my favourite books was *Charlie And The Chocolate Factory,* by Roald Dahl, and what struck me about the book is that certain parts of it made me absolutely CRAVE chocolate. I don't think I'd ever read a book that gave me such a visceral response. So when I wrote the Chocolate Story, I set out to create the same craving among players, to make them want to go and get some chocolate and fulfil that hunger. From the reactions I got, I was at least partially successful."

***Callahan's* features a wealth of gorgeous, varied scenarios, rich in background detail and clickable hotspots which reward the player with hilarious descriptions.** Josh explains how it all came together. "We were quite involved (by 'we' I mean Jim Montanus and I – Jim ended up doing so much work on the game that I thought he earned an assistant designer credit). We would get rough pencils from Kinetic Arts, the company doing the artwork, and we'd make our changes and suggestions, and get it back, and each background and character usually ended up going through several iterations based on our feedback. At one point, we had to stop what they were doing, because they were taking artwork from other sources (I think Norman Rockwell was one such source) and interpolating them into the scenes. Naturally we had to make sure that wasn't happening. But we ended up very pleased with the outcome. As a rough guide, at first, I had given them some samples of *MAD* magazine splash pages – usually the first page of some long parody, that would be chock-full of little gags, items and things to riff off of. I wanted the backgrounds really heavily populated with interesting and varied things. They did that beautifully."

> *"They simply heard the name – Callahan's Crosstime Saloon – and figured it must be a Western-themed adventure. So the advertisements all played off that idea, which was obviously totally wrong"*
>
> **Josh Mandel**

Despite all its charm and invention, *Callahan's* wasn't the commercial success it should have been, despite a good critical reception. Josh has a pretty good idea of why this quirky, innovative adventure didn't quite reach its audience at first.

"I think three things went wrong. First, it was rushed. They wanted it out for Christmas and the game simply wasn't ready. In fact, they rushed so much that they inadvertently released a beta version, not the gold master. Among other issues, there was a fatal bug that some people would get with that version. So we had to issue a patch to fix some of the problems. The second thing that went wrong was that the release was rushed – it seemed to be a last-minute decision to release it, so the advertising did not coincide with the release. And the last thing that went wrong was that nobody at Take Two bothered to boot up the game and learn about it. They simply heard the name – *Callahan's Crosstime Saloon* – and figured it must be a Western-themed adventure. So the advertisements all played off that idea, which was obviously totally wrong."

Let's face it, though: *Callahan's Crosstime Saloon* has always been a place for the lonely, the troubled, and those in search of a friend. It's not for everyone, but it's for anyone; the door's open to all. No surprise, really, that the game based on Spider Robinson's creation is a cherished outlier, always being discovered by those who need it most.

So pull up a stool in Callahan's Place to share your joys and your sorrows in the company of Josh Mandel, one of Sierra's greats. Just remember to bring all your best puns with you. You're going to need them.

» [PC] You rang, m'lord? Er, no, actually, which is a bit creepy…

» [PC] The mysterious, bearded man who walked into Callahan's tonight holds our fate in his hands.

» [PC] Get yourself tattooed with a barcode, of all things, in a dystopian future world.

» [Game Box Color] Once a puzzle is completed, the detailed outline is revealed and colours are filled in.

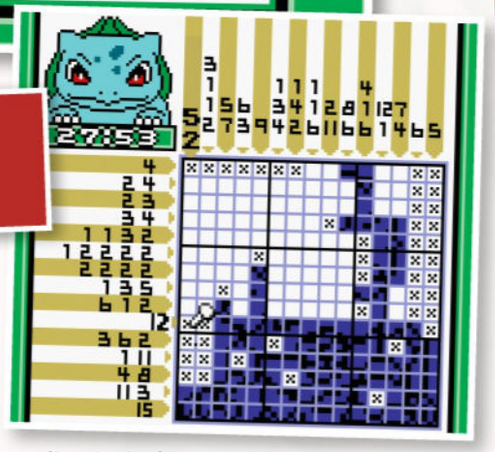
» [Game Box Color] Having reached the SS Anne, your character asks Charmander if it wants to join him.

» [Game Box Color] It's the Squirtle Squad, putting out a fire just like in the anime series.

POKÉMON PICROSS

Even if you lived by the motto 'gotta catch 'em all' in the Nineties, this puzzle game starring Pikachu and pals is the one that got away

Words by Nick Thorpe



» [Game Boy Color] Here's a puzzle in progress, with Bulbasaur serving as our partner Pokémon.

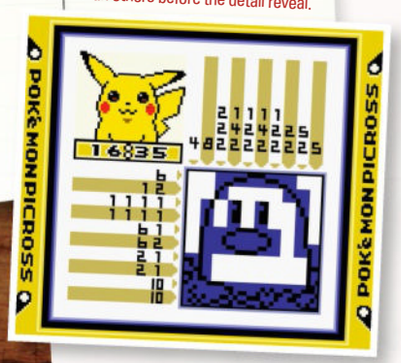
IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

» **DEVELOPER:** JUPITER

» **SYSTEM:** GAME BOY COLOR

» **DUE FOR RELEASE:** 1999



» [Game Boy Color] Some Pokémon outlines are easier to make out than others before the detail reveal.

When a publisher has a hot property on its hands and wants to create a spin-off, chances are it will make a puzzle game at some point. Major series like *Mario*, *Street Fighter* and *Bomberman* have all taken advantage of the genre's versatility over the years, and the likes of *Puzzle Bobble* have arguably even eclipsed the games they were based on. *Picross* is a particularly flexible base for such a game since you can theme it around pretty much anything that can be drawn, without much need for mechanical innovation.

With that in mind, it's no shock that the idea of putting *Pokémon* and *Picross* together occurred soon after the roaring success of the original Game Boy games, but the convoluted route towards it actually happening is rather surprising. The earliest evidence of plans to do so is found in prototype versions of *Pokémon Gold* and *Silver*, dating back to Nintendo's Space World show from November 1997. Leaked builds with debug features enabled allow players to access a variety of minigames, one of which is a version of *Picross* using *Pokémon* menu sprites. This wasn't found in the final version of the game, however.

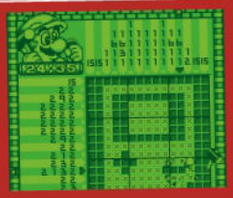
In 1999, a new dedicated *Pokémon Picross* game for the Game Boy was revealed in a number of Japanese magazines. Extensive preview coverage was printed in the May and June issues of the long-running Japanese manga magazine *CoroCoro Comic*, showing off the three main game modes – Professor Oak's tutorial, Easy Picross and Pokémon Picross – complete with screenshots of each, showcasing the various Pokémon you could choose as partners and the town map from which you could select puzzles. It was also shown that the Pokédex mode would give you the ability to print stickers of the Pokémon you'd seen, using the Game Boy Printer.

Unfortunately that initial round of coverage was never followed up and *Pokémon Picross* quietly disappeared. The game was considered to be lost for 20 years, with some fans speculating that any work done on the game may have been transferred to *Picross NP Vol 1*, a Super Famicom release featuring *Pokémon* characters. In 2020, Nintendo's servers were breached and a wide

SIMILAR STUMPERS

MARIO'S PICROSS
1995, JUPITER/APE

■ If you want *Picross* on the Game Boy, you'll need to stick with Mario as the star. This first game received an international release, but its commercial performance meant that the sequel stayed in Japan.



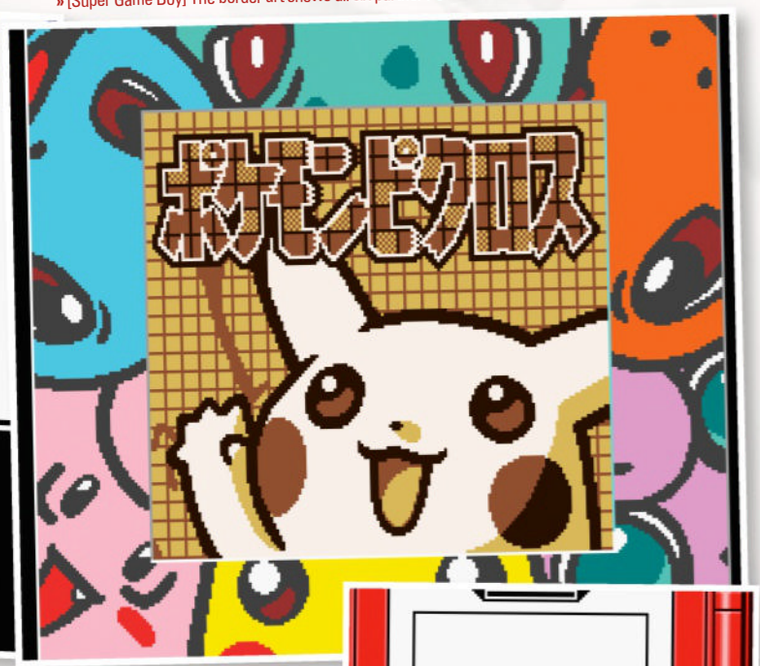
PICROSS NP VOL 1
1999, JUPITER

■ The first in a series of Super Famicom *Picross* games released via the Nintendo Power cartridge writing service, the Character mode here features 12 *Pokémon*-themed puzzles alongside regular ones.

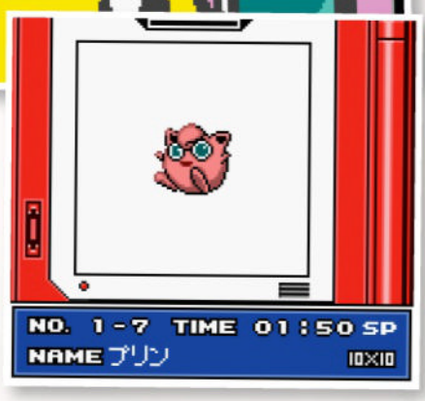
POKÉMON PICROSS
2015, JUPITER

■ This free-to-play downloadable game was released for the 3DS, and featured hundreds of *Picross* puzzles. The closure of the 3DS eShop in 2023 means that this game is now unavailable to download.

» [Game Boy Color] Professor Oak, Misty and Bill each show up to talk to the player at various points.



» [Super Game Boy] The border art shows all six partner Pokémon – and misspells the game's name.



» [Game Boy Color] You can view any Pokémon in the Pokédex after finishing its puzzle.

> "From our perspective, the cancellation of Pokémon Picross seems utterly baffling – the game seems to be complete and ready for release"

variety of internal emails and game development assets going back to the early Nineties were leaked. A Japanese ROM image of *Pokémon Picross* became available to the public for the first time as a result.

The main Pokémon Picross mode is divided into ten stages, based on memorable locations like the Pokémon Tower and the SS Anne. Each stage initially contains 14 puzzles, played using standard *Picross* rules – you'll need to clear eight of them to progress to the next stage, and you'll unlock an extra puzzle in each stage if you can complete eight puzzles within special time limits. Each puzzle adds a new Pokémon to your Pokédex, and the full original roster of 151 are represented. That's not the only way you can acquire Pokémon, as a new one will join your party every other stage, adding another background music option.

One aspect of *Pokémon Picross* that wasn't revealed in the preview coverage was the Safari Picross mode, unlocked on completion of the main Pokémon Picross mode. This harder variant of the game doesn't offer hints, and quite a few of the puzzles depict memorable moments from the anime series. Another thing not made apparent was that the game was compatible with the original Game Boy. This was a sensible decision that was in keeping with the main releases, allowing for maximum sales potential. Super Game Boy support was included, with some nice border art but no special colour palettes for the main game.

From our perspective, the cancellation of *Pokémon Picross* seems utterly baffling – the game seems to be complete and ready for release, and it's a polished effort. It wasn't the end of the road for the crossover though, as Jupiter developed another game titled *Pokémon Picross* as a digital download for the 3DS in 2015. Though the Game Boy Color game was never announced for an English release and the Japanese version is easy to play without any knowledge of the language, fans have now translated the game. Though it was rarer than a legitimate Mew for a long time, if you're a fan of *Pokémon* or *Picross*, this elusive game is well worth catching if you can. ✱

ULTIMATE GUIDE

HOGS OF WAR

TREMENDOUS TURN-BASED TACTICS AND VERY BRITISH HUMOUR BUILT HOGS OF WAR A CULT FOLLOWING IN THE YEARS AFTER IT FIRST BROUGHT BACON TO THE BATTLEFIELD. JOIN US ON A RECONNAISSANCE MISSION THAT YIELDS DEVELOPER INSIGHTS AND NEWS OF A REMASTER

WORDS BY GRAHAM PEMBREY

There were plenty of novel ideas packed into *Hogs Of War* – not least its uniquely porky protagonists. But the warm fuzz of familiarity is also a big part of why the game remains cherished 23 years on from being released for PlayStation and PC. The vintage wartime aesthetic carried strong shades of *Blackadder*, making it only too fitting that a star of that show – the since sadly departed comedy legend Rik Mayall – was enlisted to record riotously over-the-top voice-overs for the hogs. When added to the marching song from *Monty Python's Flying Circus* chiming out cheerfully as you navigate menu screens, you can understand why many fans of classic British comedy felt right at home.

Familiarity also shines through in the gameplay, which has some heritage in the artillery game genre. *Artillery Simulator*, released in 1980 on the Apple II, is an early example of what we mean here; its turn-based battling involved adjusting the angle and power of your projectile before blasting over pixelated hills at your rival. *Scorched Earth* for MS-DOS is another notable mention in the field for adding a wide assortment of weapons into the fold. But surely the most famous title you could neatly place into this category is *Worms*, and that game in particular is the one Gremlin Interactive founder Ian Stewart cited as an inspiration when he briefed the development team about his hopes for *Hogs Of War*. As lead PC developer Andrew Fox tells us (see Developer Q&A) the crux of the concept was "3D pigs with *Worms* gameplay".

For all that, its greatest influence might be thinly camouflaged, *Hogs Of War* marched the genre forward into the relative no-man's land of 3D graphics. The developers also added a relatively sophisticated single-player experience compared to *Worms*, incorporating experience points, career paths for soldiers and a diverse range of levels that pack some neat surprises, ▶

» [PlayStation] Close-range weapons like the bayonet are great for bashing enemies off ledges.

"3D PIGS WITH WORMS GAMEPLAY? WHO ISN'T GOING TO LOVE THE IDEA OF WORKING ON THAT?"
ANDREW FOX

CONVERSION CAPERS

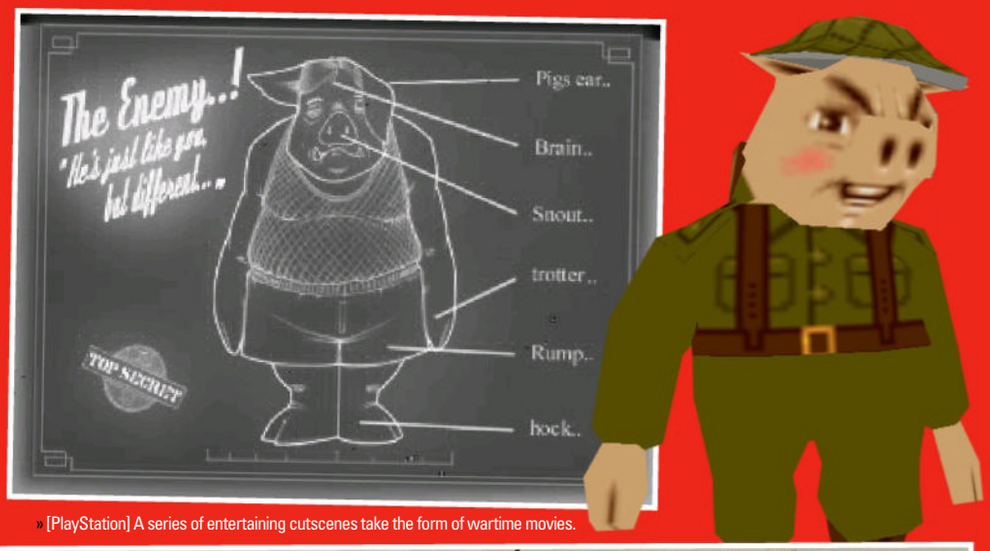
WHICH VERSION HOGS THE LIMELIGHT?

PLAYSTATION

■ The PlayStation game (in emulated form) seems to be the game of choice for the active community of players still devoted to *Hogs Of War*. The original DualShock controller was widely in use by the time *Hogs Of War* arrived, and its analogue sticks are great for moving your pigs and changing weapon trajectory. Smooth controls aside, the graphics are jagged and blocky but vibrantly colourful.

PC

■ The PC game packed an increased polygon count, hence higher-fidelity graphics, plus multiplayer networking capabilities. Much of the experience is shared with the PlayStation version. But in both the version published to Steam and GOG in 2014 and the prior PC release, there seems to be a notable AI downside compared to PlayStation – computer-controlled hogs rotate and fire, but never move into new positions.



» [PlayStation] A series of entertaining cutscenes take the form of wartime movies.

» [PlayStation] It turns out pigs really can fly (with a little help from TNT).

like bands of enemy spies suddenly parachuting into position just when you start to think a battle is won. These scenes take place across the twenty-five regions and six islands of the Saustralasia continent. But before you start marching off into battle, you'll need to choose which army you want to control: Tommy's Trotters, Sow-A-Krauts, Uncle Ham's Hogs, Piggystrokia, Sushi Swine or Garlic Grunters.

After swearing allegiance to one of those thinly veiled national sides and parachuting into the first level, the turn-based tactics begin. "Each soldier must calmly await its turn to deal death and destruction," the manual explains, because "pigs have a strong sense of fair play". The description continues with the conclusion that, "War has never been so polite," seemingly in tribute to a similar strapline from the classic Amiga game *Cannon Fodder*. Yet any sense of civility is shattered by the 40-plus weapons at your disposal across the full extent of the game, ranging from the simple slap of a trotter to the seismic blast of Super TNT. Some of these weapons are granted to your hogs as they progress through their career paths, while others can only be collected from crates that are scattered across (or occasionally parachuted into) the battlefield. Just like in *Cannon Fodder*, throughout the campaign you feel the lingering threat of permanently losing members of your squad who you've personally named and carefully built up. After dying three times across missions, a soldier is out of action for good.

EARN YOUR CHOPS

CAREER PATHS YOUR PIGS CAN PURSUE

HEAVY WEAPONS

Investing in some artillery experts is a wise choice. Their bazookas have unlimited use and deal decent damage. On further promotion, mortars provide a powerful (but hard to aim) attack from very long ranges. Troops that reach the Pyrotechnic level can let loose with flame-throwers.

ESPIONAGE

Any pigs on this path are hidden from the map and can hide during their turn, transforming into a crate, a tree or whatever else is nearby. Sniper rifles become available at the Spy level – or you can just pickpocket them from enemies before that point.

MEDIC

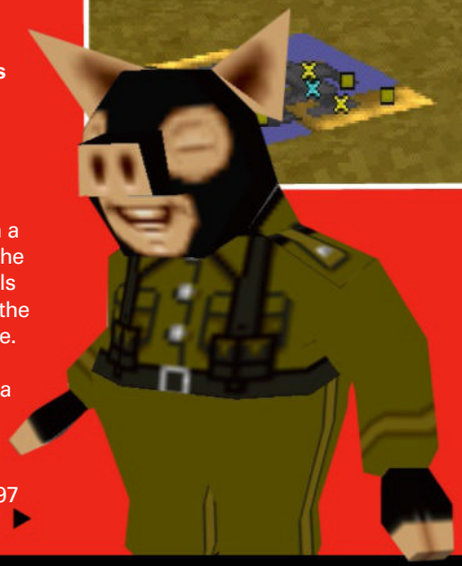
From close-range healing to medicine darts and balls, your medics can play a valuable role in bringing your troops back from the brink. Don't expect them to contribute much on the offensive side though, as their low health and weak weapons mean they're often better off hiding.

» [PlayStation] Jetpacks help you escape tricky spots and parachute into better positions.

» [PlayStation] Any poor hogs in the line of fire tend to cover in fear.

The single-player action might be carefully crafted, but multiplayer is where the real joy lies, with the ability to customise the experience for up to four players really adding to the fun. You can tweak level landmass, weather, vehicles, pickups and how many mines are scattered around the environment, as well as the number of pigs and their health count. Survival mode means the last team standing wins, while in a deathmatch the first to reach a frag limit is the victor. You can also randomly generate levels using a keyword of your choice to see how the game translates that phrase into a landscape. We entered 'Retro Gamer' and a pleasant green archipelago of scattered islands with a few dramatically steep hills emerged.

With so many features packed in, it's no surprise that development was a long process. Work on the game started in 1997 but it was August 2000 by the time it ▶



"AT ONE POINT WE REVERTED TO CUBES OF WAR, A VERSION WITHOUT ANY FANCY ARTWORK"
ANDREW FOX

ENGINEER

They may lack in longer-range attacks, but Engineers get to blow pigs up in spectacular style, and that's surely what we're all here for. TNT and shotguns are part of their repertoire. You can also self-destruct amongst enemies to take one for the team.

COMMANDO

Pigs on any progression path that promote to level four become a Commando and earn an awesome array of weaponry, including a jetpack. Progress again and the status of Hero awaits, which bestows the ability to summon blistering air strikes from blimps high above.

» [PlayStation] Comedic voice-overs for each army were delivered by Rik Mayall and Mark Silk.

» [PlayStation] Our target here looks more offended than concerned by being in our sights.

"OUR MOST BASIC INTENTION IS TO BRING HOGS INTO THE MODERN AGE"
OWEN MASON-BURNS

DEVELOPER Q&A

ANDREW FOX WAS LEAD PC PROGRAMMER FOR THE GAME

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST REACTION TO THE CONCEPT FOR *HOGS OF WAR*?
I was extremely excited. I got into the games industry in the hopes of working on a big era-defining project. Maybe *Hogs* wasn't big big, but it left a mark, and was a huge departure from all of the sports titles Gremlin was working on at the time. 3D pigs with *Worms* gameplay? Who isn't going to love the idea of working on that?

HOW WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE OF PROGRAMMING THE GAME?
It certainly was an interesting project to work on, full of ups and downs. We were a young bunch of people, for some of us *Hogs* was our first major project, so of course we had challenges. At one point we reverted back to what we affectionately called *Cubes Of War*, a version of the game without any fancy artwork; simply cubes fighting across a *Tron* landscape, just to see if the fun factor was really there. Trust me when I say, we had a blast. When a game is just as fun in such a bare-bones state, you know you're onto something.

HOW SEPARATED WAS THE PC AND PLAYSTATION DEVELOPMENT?
We were all in the same room for pretty much the whole development lifetime, artists mixed in with developers, PC mixed in with PlayStation. It was a great recipe for communication, understanding and sharing. A good chunk of the codebase was written for both platforms, I wrote the camera mechanics and the AI for both, the gameplay and physics were both shared amongst the team, whilst Jake [Habgood, lead PlayStation programmer] and I also focussed on the platform specifics and our own 3D engines.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE LEGACY OF *HOGS OF WAR*?
I loved playing the game back then, and it still has a real draw for me even now. It has such a charm, the cheeky humour, the fun gameplay, the genius that is Rik Mayall, the deserting Commando that I simply could not get to stay in the fight no matter how much digging I did through my AI code. All of it absolutely delightful. And I know it sounds trite, but I feel honoured to have had the chance to work on such an amazing game with such an amazing team of people. I'm sure every developer dreams of their 'once-in-a-lifetime' game development experience, and I was lucky enough to have mine in *Hogs*. And even now I bump into people who loved the original. It makes me smile that we had that effect on people's lives, and I feel proud to have added to videogame history, if only in a small way.

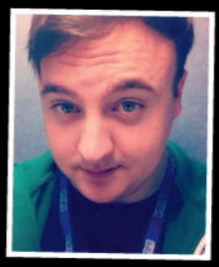
▶ finally emerged on PlayStation. That was only two months before the next-generation PlayStation 2 was launched, making it a very late-life cycle release for Sony's first console. Reviews were mostly upbeat but with some variation. The average consensus across critics seems to have sat around 8/10, with Eurogamer going for 9/10 and *CVG* dropping to 60%. The endearing humour and extensive multiplayer modes were praised; even the low-scoring *CVG* conceded that, "In multiplayer mode, it rocks." But the occasionally glitchy graphics came in for criticism, with GameSpot arguing that, "The background environments and standing structures constantly distract with their blocky, jagged, and choppy appearances." The single-player game was also felt to be frustrating in its more difficult later levels. Sales were clearly solid enough for Infogrames (which had acquired Gremlin Interactive while the game was made) to sneak a sequel announcement into a 2008 financial report, but the plan was later dropped as the company went through financial difficulties.

Retrospective appraisals have tended to be warmer than the original reception, with many write-ups championing *Hogs Of War* as an underrated cult classic. Graphically, just like many late-Nineties attempts at 3D, it may not have aged brilliantly. And it's hard to ignore that some of the voiceover impersonations of different nations feel somewhat close to the bone by today's standards, even if no country involved escapes a gentle lampooning. But the game remains a superb multiplayer experience, and it holds enough affection that an active online community of fans has developed.

Owen Mason-Burns, also known as Pinstripe, is an active member of that community and started a Discord to bring fans together. "The Discord has grown to almost 2,000 members, our Subreddit has exploded to almost 700 users, and the speedrunning scene has kicked off, alongside our competitive league," Owen tells us. Such fandom has led to an official remaster of the game, which Owen is also closely involved in making (see Reviving *Hogs Of War*). As if that's not enough, a card game version is available from Stone Sword Games, after a Kickstarter in 2019 raised £19,000 from 680 backers in just 30 days. And a board game followed last year after another successful fundraising campaign. If that kind of backing is anything to go on, we think the remaster of the game stands a great chance of going the whole hog. ✱

REVIVING HOGS OF WAR

THE LATEST ON THE OFFICIAL REMASTER OF THE GAME



With a background as a QA lead and game artist, Owen Mason-Burns started a popular *Hogs Of War* YouTube channel in 2018. He's since become lead designer for *Lardcore* – an official remaster sanctioned by Ian Stewart, the original CEO of Gremlin Interactive and current IP holder for the game. "There are definitely elements of the original we are trying to capture, that deep gritty First World War aesthetic for one," Owen tells us. "But we're also balancing that with the level of humour the original did so well. Our most basic intention is to bring *Hogs* into the modern age and give it a face lift, but also improve on several areas."

Access to the original codebase has been key. "We are using that original code to run the game's AI and logic," Owen explains. "So if you were to play *Lardcore* right now it would feel just as the original did, right down to the way pigs move, shoot and die. But we of course want to bring further improvements to that gameplay."

The next step for the team is a Kickstarter campaign, with PlayStation 4/5 their main development platform. "We are working with the community to see what fans want most. The biggest outcry has of course been for the likes of online multiplayer, team customisation, porting to PC and Xbox, as well as further DLC content," says Owen. "We're trying to remain grounded in what is achievable, but if the Kickstarter is super successful then it's certainly food for thought." You can visit hogsofwar.org to find out more.

Hardware Heaven

ESSENTIAL GAME

Soul Of Darkness

There is no shortage of great handheld *Castlevania* games – but what is a player to do if they've already beaten them all? Play this very clear tribute to Konami's classic series, that's what. It's more linear than the standard Metroidvania-style games that *Castlevania* was known for in that era, and though it's a port of a mobile game, it's rather impressive with some nice visuals and audio, despite a small file size and a low asking price. The only struggle for new players will be finding a way to acquire it.

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

DSi fact

■ DSiWare games can no longer be legally bought. The DSi Shop for DSi consoles shut down in 2017, but the range lived on via the 3DS eShop until that store was closed to new purchases in 2023.

GRAPHICS: TWO 256X192 RESOLUTION DISPLAYS, TWO 2D ENGINES (FOUR BACKGROUND LAYERS, 128 SPRITES PER FRAME), 3D ENGINE (UP TO 122,880 POLYGONS PER SECOND)

POWER: 840 MAH RECHARGEABLE LITHIUM ION BATTERY (APPROX. 9-14 HOURS PLAY)

STORAGE: 256MB FLASH MEMORY, SD CARD (UP TO 32GB, OPTIONAL)

MEDIA: NINTENDO DS GAME CARD (UP TO 512MB)

AUDIO: 16 STEREO PCM/ADPCM CHANNELS

PROCESSORS: 32-BIT ARM9 (133 MHZ), 32-BIT ARM7 (33 MHZ)

RAM: 16MB

DSi

» **MANUFACTURER:** Nintendo » **YEAR:** 2008
» **COST:** £149.99 (launch), £20+ (today, boxed), £10+ (today, unboxed)

By the time Nintendo began to create the DSi in late 2006, it was already clear that the DS was a monster hit, so the goal of the new handheld was simply to provide a strong mid-generation refresh. That goal was accomplished, with a faster CPU and four times the RAM of prior models, as well as internal memory and an SD card slot for storing DSiWare games from a new online store. The console also offered slightly larger screens and two cameras.

Not all of the changes were positive, though. A lower-capacity battery offered less game time per charge than the DS Lite, and the removal of the Game Boy Advance cartridge slot greatly reduced the library of games available. Worst of all, the DSi was the first Nintendo handheld to support region locking, albeit only for DSi-enhanced games. Regardless, the DSi revitalised the DS in Japan, where demand had stagnated by the time of its launch in 2008, and helped Nintendo to sustain interest in the platform worldwide despite the challenges of a major global recession.

THE MAKING OF CALL OF D

THE STORY OF CALL OF DUTY BEGINS NOT AT ACTIVISION, BUT IN THE BOSOM OF ITS CHIEF RIVAL, EA. THE LATTER PUBLISHER HAD TASKED A DEVELOPER NAMED 2015 INC WITH EXPANDING ITS TERRITORY ONTO PC WITH MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

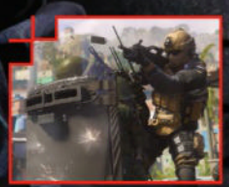
WORDS BY JEREMY PEEL

» [PC] *Call Of Duty* boasts an impressive array of weaponry across its three campaigns, and you'll need to master all of them.

UTY

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- **DEVELOPER:** INFINITY WARD
- **RELEASED:** 2003
- **PLATFORM:** PC, MAC
- **GENRE:** FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

CALL OF DUTY 2
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 2005

CALL OF DUTY: WARZONE
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 4, PC, XBOX ONE
YEAR: 2020

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE III (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC, VARIOUS
YEAR: 2023

> "UP UNTIL THAT POINT, A LOT OF GAMES WERE HYPER-COLOURED AND BRIGHT AND SHINY, AND THIS WAS NOT"
> **BRAD ALLEN**

"Steven Spielberg started *Medal Of Honor*," says artist Brad Allen. "He sent us a video one time, commending certain things that he was liking in the game as we were progressing. It was super neat to get to work on a Spielberg project."

Brad's role at 2015 Inc was his first games industry job. In fact, although the studio had secured a modicum of credibility in first-person shooter circles with its *SiN* expansion, *Wages Of Sin*, it was mostly populated by young and inexperienced developers – nearly all of whom had travelled to Tulsa, Oklahoma from elsewhere in America to seize their breakthrough opportunity. "I had moved out there from California, so it was a bit of a culture shock," Brad says. "But it was really fun."

Robert Field, a modder who had built the enemy AI for *Quake*'s popular Frogbot, was even further from home. He arrived at Tulsa International Airport on 15 December 2000, when development on *Allied Assault* was already underway. "I'm from Brisbane in Australia, so walking around in the snow in Tulsa was interesting," he says. "We even had a tornado once."

The weather was tolerable because the work was fulfilling. With the Nineties over, *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* looked like the future. "To me, up until that point, a lot of games were hyper-coloured and bright and shiny, and this was not," Brad says. "This was subdued and realistic looking, and all the colours were drab. It was much more rich and interesting, the way they were presenting it."

The foundations for *Call Of Duty* were set here, in the shadow of Spielberg. In place of the machismo of *Doom* and *Duke Nukem* was a more subtle sense of historic pride, mingled with sadness and a sense of sacrifice. Your avatar wasn't a superman, but a vulnerable soldier victimised by World War II, attempting to carry out hair-raising orders as best they could. This was an interactive *Saving Private Ryan* or *Band Of Brothers*. Or at least, it would be, if 2015 Inc's rabble could all push in the right direction.

"When I arrived, the animation system and everything was broken because they were replacing everything," Robert says. "I didn't know much about it because I was a mod author, so I thought, 'Oh, this is what you do.' Later on, Jason West brought the discipline where you always have a working game and you're able to show prototypes." Jason West had joined the team as a programmer to

» [PC] The campaigns were punctuated by a number of frantic and tightly-scripted chase sequences.

» [PC] Sometimes you stuck closely to a single squad of soldiers for multiple missions.

» [PC] Your objective was often to locate and sabotage enemy equipment, like heavy artillery.

work on a console port. "But then I think Vince Zampella convinced him to take over," Robert says. "He became pretty much the lead of *Allied Assault*. We were a bunch of mod authors and he came on and got us meeting the schedule."

Brad, who was creating the game's characters, would grab photos of members of the team and transform them into German or American soldiers, telling them, "You're gonna be the bad guy."

"Everybody that I was working with was super talented, and super enthusiastic about what we were making," he says. "Everybody wanted to put the special sauce on it and spend the extra hours. It was really a fun experience, minus a few other things."

Some on the *Allied Assault* team had concluded that they didn't want to stay at 2015 Inc beyond the end of the project. "We weren't going to get a good deal with the owner of 2015," Robert says. "Jason, Vince and Grant [Collier] wanted a better deal where we got royalty sharing."

Resolving to set up a new company, a handful of key staff started to make moves. "We were all over the place, with five or six guys sneaking off to lunches and going, 'What are we going to do?,'" Brad says. "We had no idea what the name of the company was going to be. We just started spitballing ideas for games. One of our ex-producers had connections with different publishers, and he was like, 'What if we got this IP or that IP?' So it was really exciting. There were a ton of different ideas floating around and options that we could have done."

Yet the first thing the new Infinity Ward worked on was, in fact, *Medal Of Honor*. More precisely, an add-on pack for *Allied Assault* at the behest of EA. "We were still working on the same game, with the same publisher, but as another company," Brad says.

Many packed up and vacated the 2015 Inc office overnight. Although, as Brad remembers, Robert didn't get the memo straight away, "Robert was away on vacation or out of the country or something. So we didn't have a way to let him know. He shows up the next day, and everybody's gone. I think Grant contacted him and let him know, 'Hey, we're here, this is what's going on'. He may have been a little bewildered."

> "WE WERE ABOUT TO GO UNDER AND GET ABSORBED INTO THE EA COLLECTIVE. AND ACTIVISION SWOOPED IN"
> **BRAD ALLEN**

The change and bewilderment didn't end there. When Infinity Ward was deep into development on its *Medal Of Honor* expansion, EA stopped paying for the work. "We were about to go under and get absorbed into the EA collective," Brad says. "And Activision swooped in. They were like, 'Hey, we'll fund your next project. If you work for us, you can stay together as a team.' And that was a really big issue for us, because we really liked working with each other."

"It's a family type of thing," Robert says. "We felt we had a good team, and we had Jason, who was pretty much the team leader, so we all rallied behind him."

Activision wanted Infinity Ward to make a competitor to *Medal Of Honor* – an idea which didn't enthuse the entire team, who had already spent years with their heads in a simulated Second World War. But it was the best offer they had, and so they agreed – initiating a partnership that has now lasted for two decades and counting. "The goal was having a good solid team of people to work with that we liked," Brad says. "We trusted each other's instincts and talents [at Infinity Ward], and it was a great opportunity to continue working with nearly everybody."

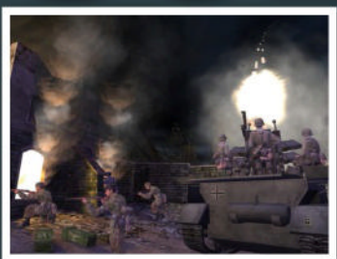
Twenty-two people had worked on *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*. "And when *Call Of Duty* started, we all moved six miles down the road in Tulsa," Robert says. The team occupied the 37th floor of the 60-story CityPlex tower. The iconic local building was first built by controversial televangelist Oral Roberts at the request of, as he told it, a 900-foot vision of Jesus. "Thirty-seven flights of stairs is not fun for fire alarms," Robert says. "After the first alarm I said, 'I'm not trashing my knees anymore. If it burns down, it burns down.'"

Infinity Ward was led by Ward, Zampella and Courier. "To fund *Call Of Duty*, Grant was maxing out his credit card originally," Robert says. "He was important from a biz point of view. And he got paid out well in the end."

Ward was the creative force, however – steering the team through a tight 18 months of development. "Starting from *Call Of Duty*,

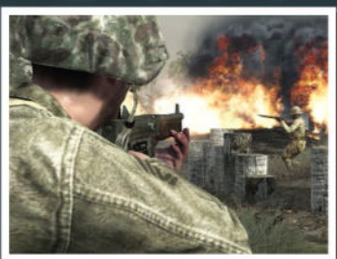
COD IN BRIEF

THE TEN DEFINING ENTRIES TO THE SERIES



CALL OF DUTY

The original PC hit imbued *Medal Of Honor*'s formula with a new sense of shock and awe. Iron sights brought the action in close, and muzzle flare made it frightening for the first time. A rare FPS that balanced power with vulnerability.



CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR

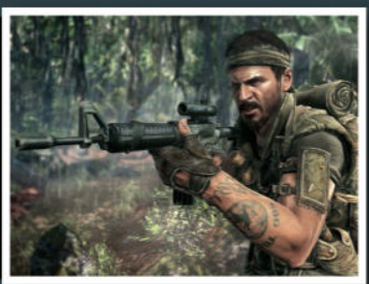
Where Infinity Ward had established a sombre tone of Spielberg-esque respect for those who fought in World War II, Treyarch embraced horror motifs, expanding the tonal palette of *Call Of Duty* for better or worse.

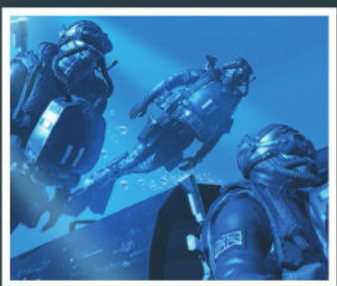
CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

An adventure in embodying impossible perspectives, this most zeitgeist-y of *COD*s let you attend your own execution at gunpoint, and dropped a nuclear bomb on your head. In 2007, it was all anyone could talk about.

CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS

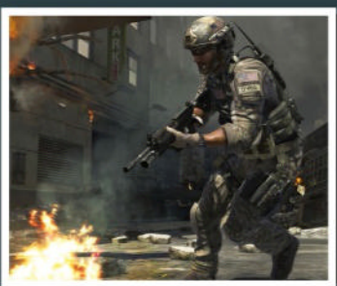
Treyarch finally stepped out of the shadow of Infinity Ward with an audacious paranoid thriller which, like *Forrest Gump*, seemed to take in every major political event in American history from the 1960s onward. Mean-spirited yet memorable.





CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2

Infinity Ward jumped the shark here. The follow-up to a behind-the-headlines SAS story, this was a bombastic interactive *Bond* movie, which courted controversy with an infamous level about shooting up an airport packed with civilians.



CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 3

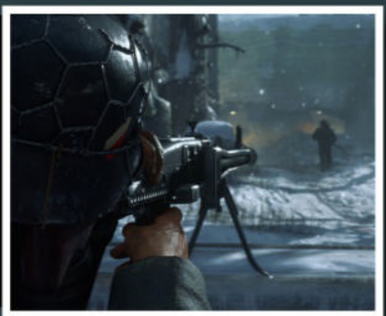
Sledgehammer managed to pull together a respectable, if over-egged, campaign – hiding the fact that Infinity Ward was falling apart, and its key staff fleeing to EA to set up Respawn. The latter move would lead to *Titanfall* and *Apex Legends*.

CALL OF DUTY: INFINITE WARFARE

COD's best told story, *Infinite Warfare* features a surprisingly grounded science-fiction tale of human colonists on Mars, returning to Earth to wrest it from the weak and complacent. It was roundly rejected by fans who wanted more traditional fare.

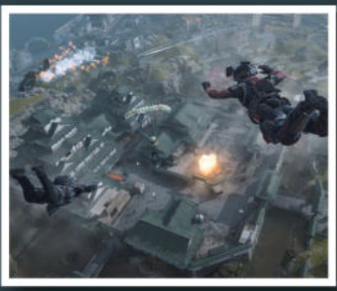
CALL OF DUTY: WWII

Representing a retreat for the series, Sledgehammer's entry returned to the setting in which *Call Of Duty* first made its name. Yet its campaign offered excellent first-person cinema, and its multiplayer featured brave experiments in huge, dynamic battles.



CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE (2019)

Infinity Ward entered its remix era with this self-referential visit to the events of 2007. Both its campaign and its multiplayer succeeded by embracing intimacy – going smaller to increase the tension, without reducing the stakes.



CALL OF DUTY: WARZONE

PUBG invented the battle royale, and *Fortnite* took it mainstream. But *Warzone* struck the balance, retaining the hardcore multiplayer stealth appeal of Brendan Greene's original while tuning its skirmishes towards speed and approachability. A true phenomenon.

CAMPAIGN TRAIL

INSIDE THE THREE STORIES COD TOLD

AMERICAN

Private Martin lands in France as a paratrooper in June 1944. With his unit scattered, he joins a ragtag impromptu fighting force to take out anti-aircraft positions ahead of D-Day, the events of which were covered in *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*. After that success, he's assigned to rescue two British officers, Captain Price and Major Ingram, from a Bavarian manor.

BRITISH

Captain Price leads a unit, including the player character Sergeant Jack Evans, to clear Pegasus Bridge in Bénouville of Wehrmacht soldiers. Before long, Evans is transferred to the SAS, with whom he sabotages the Eder Dam. Evans and Price then pose as Kriegsmarine sailors to infiltrate the battleship Tirpitz and disable its defences. In many ways, this is an early prototype for *Modern Warfare*'s campaign.

RUSSIAN

Call Of Duty on hard mode, the Russian campaign begins as a gruelling yet thrilling battle to kick the Nazis out of Stalingrad. Corporal Alexei Ivanovich Voronin is witness to Soviet officers killing their own retreating soldiers, and isn't always equipped with a weapon himself. By January 1945, though, Voronin is promoted and leads his old unit to raise the victory banner atop the roof of the Reichstag in Berlin.

» [PC] Muzzle flare helped deliver on the sense of danger, and gave away enemy positions.

Jason had a whole system of how we do features," Robert says. "At the beginning, all the level designers would write on cards the things they wanted in the game. Then the programmers would estimate how long that would take and look at our schedule and say, 'OK, this is how many things we think we can do.' We'd prioritise them and go down the list. We were scarred pretty badly from *Allied Assault*, where it got delayed."

The team put together a detailed design doc – something they wouldn't bother with on later projects. "I guess we were trying to impress Activision," Robert says. "And Jason wanted to make sure we were on track."

The addition of multiplayer was a compromise, made to please the publisher – a surprise, given how important the online component would later become to the series. "There was this notion back then of back-of-the-box features, and Activision was focussed on the buzzwords," Robert says. "We said, 'OK, we'll add multiplayer.' By *Modern Warfare*, half the development was on multiplayer. Earlier on, it was just minimal."

> "WE WERE PUT OFF BY THE IDEA OF HAVING JUST THE ONE HERO CHARACTER THAT SAVES EVERYBODY IN THE WAR"
> **BRAD ALLEN**

Infinity Ward's primary focus was the campaign, an ambitious single-player mode that would see the player fight on different fronts of the war as three separate soldiers – one Russian, one British, one American. "Probably at one point it was more than three," Brad says. "But we had to narrow it down for scope reasons, and have it all be able to fit on a CD."

The decision to back multiple protagonists would have huge implications for *COD*'s future of perspective-swapping stories. "I think we were put off by the idea of having just the one hero character that saves everybody in the war," Brad says. "It didn't feel as realistic. We wanted to represent everybody that contributed to that part of history."

Like *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, *Call Of Duty* was to be T-rated in the United States – suitable for ages 13 and up, with violence but little blood. Nonetheless, Infinity Ward wanted to ramp up the grittiness and intensity. "We had aiming down the sight and going prone, those sorts of things that were more tactical," Brad says. "A lot of the guys were playing *Counter-Strike* and they liked all those aspects of the shooting and the realism."

Players of the first *Call Of Duty* demo were in awe when, during a nighttime assault on the French village of Sainte-Mère-Église, the impact of a nearby mortar shell would flatten their character prone, the impact ringing in their ears.

"There was a lot of cool attention to detail that was put into that," Brad says. "We wanted it to feel like the player was the person, and the immersion was the thing. And it didn't have to be a name that went with a character that you were playing. It was really the idea of getting a feel for what it would be like to be in that situation."

Brad was one of five artists on a team that ultimately totalled 26. "And a lot of people wore a lot of different hats," he says. "That was a good aspect of a small company. You're able to play with whatever you can." During one memorable mission, the player crosses the Volga river into Stalingrad with a group of Red Army conscripts – and watches in horror as a boat of friendlies is struck by German artillery. Brad got to animate the ship as it sank into the depths.

"I had our lead animator holding my hand and going, 'Try this, we're going to make this a little more extreme,'" he says. "It was a learning experience. Everybody was free to contribute." And if an idea didn't work out, nobody got into trouble. "That added to the game being as good as it was, because everybody was heard and everybody got excited about throwing out an idea," Brad says. "Maybe it would stick, or somebody might be able to help make it better."

» [PC] The mobile shoot-out is a format *Call Of Duty* still deals in to this day.

The Stalingrad level was heavily influenced by *Enemy At The Gates*, the 2001 Jude Law movie that follows two rival snipers over a long winter of battle. In one harrowing moment, the player is handed ammo rather than a gun – and commanded to pick up the rifle of a fellow soldier once he is killed. It's a scene pulled directly from the film.

"Level designer Steve Fukuda had *Saving Private Ryan* running on another screen continually during the whole game, pretty much," Robert says. "Actually, there was talk that Activision wanted to make a *Band Of Brothers* series. But then they'd have to pay licensing. I don't think it would've been the best decision."

The team was hungry for any new piece of cinema that featured the Second World War. "That helped us with setting things apart visually," Brad says. "Luckily there was a nice wealth of really strong cinematography. Having that goal of making things feel cinematic and real and heavy led the way for the look of the three campaigns."

Research tools were worth their weight in gold. "Whatever books we could find," Brad says. "Whatever things we could find on the internet. For the second *COD*, we sent a bunch of guys to different places for photo reference. But for the first one it was all about Google."

Infinity Ward bought model kits, and visited tank and aircraft museums on photo safaris. "When you didn't have a whole lot of access, you worked with what was close by, and luckily in Southern California there's a plethora of places that have all these artefacts and equipment from back in the day," Brad says. "Even if it's not in the best condition, all of that wear and tear adds to the flavour. You don't want everything to look perfect, even though probably at the time it was brand-new. If you throw a little dirt and rust on it in the game, it just looks cool." Legendary military consultant Dale Dye returned, having worked with the team on *Medal Of Honor*. But the artists most valued their time with re-enactors, who would allow their gear to be photographed, "We were always trying to be as accurate as we could."

» [PC] A dam infiltration saw *COD* lean into espionage, though it featured no true stealth mechanics.

» [PC] Infinity Ward set up a poignant contrast between quaint French countryside and brutal battle.

> "THERE WAS TALK THAT ACTIVISION WANTED TO MAKE A BAND OF BROTHERS SERIES. BUT THEN THEY'D HAVE TO PAY LICENSING"
> **ROBERT FIELD**

***Call Of Duty* sold the idea that, rather than a catchphrase-ready commando, you were just one face in a crowd of desperate fighters.** Robert worked on the AI, ensuring that each soldier could navigate the rubble and get to their intended destination, "If you've ever seen an AI clip through a wall in *Call Of Duty*, that's using the fail-safe that Jason said we definitely had to have," he says. "He said, 'No matter what, they have to get from point A to point B.' If the AI doesn't get there, the level's broken, it's not going to continue. If they were really getting in trouble, getting caught on something, I would just noclip them wherever they're trying to go."

In some of the larger battles, Infinity Ward compromised on the intelligence of its troops, by having the more distant soldiers follow animated paths rather than using their heads. "When you get off the boat in Stalingrad and all the guys are running up, they're actually not AI," Robert says.

Among the hundreds of soldiers who passed through *Call Of Duty*'s campaign, one moustachioed individual stood out: Captain Price. "It's pretty crazy," Brad says. "He made it all the way to *Modern Warfare*. He's one of the key guys now, he was the guy that stuck. Everybody was meant to be, not throwaway, but they weren't supposed to be the heroes. Everybody was supposed to be a hero, so nobody was supposed to be the main badass."

The "big crazy struggle" of the project came in the summer of 2003, the year *Call Of Duty* was to ship. That's when all of Infinity Ward upped sticks and moved from Oklahoma to California – into the LA building they would occupy until *Modern Warfare 3*. "We were more than just coworkers," Robert says. "And the fact that we all came from Tulsa, it's like this journey you're on."

"We were packing up all our stuff, figuring out where we were gonna live, and had to hit the ground running and make this game," Brad says. "It didn't really seem to affect us as much as we thought it was going to, because everybody was nose to the grindstone. We were all there as many hours as we could be." There were no demands that staff show up on the weekends. "But a lot of people were, because that was the mentality," Brad says. "As a new company trying to prove ourselves, everybody was super focussed on making our first game really good. Or else we wouldn't get to make another game. There were a lot of unspoken stresses."

Los Angeles was chosen partly because it was near Activision HQ, and would allow studio leaders easy access to the producers

DAM GOOD

WHAT MADE CALL OF DUTY SO IMPORTANT?

REEL-ISM

■ Infinity Ward drew on the history of war cinema to evoke both horrors and derring do, the latter reserved primarily for the British campaign.

MOVEMENT TRACKING

■ *Call Of Duty* tracked whether you were standing, crouching, or prone. This bodily focus was inspired by *Counter-Strike* and was crucial to master.

REALISTIC GEAR

■ The development team's artists worked with professional consultants and re-enactors to photograph and recreate the gear of World War II as it was.

STAYING SAFE

■ The vulnerability of your avatar was impossible to ignore. Rather than side-strafing into battle, you were often cowering or scrambling desperately for cover.

BIG BANG

■ New graphical fidelity wasn't used just to impress but to simulate the shocking impacts of the weaponry going off around you.

COMPETITIVE SHOOTING

MEET THE GAMES COD WAS UP AGAINST

MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT

After the loss of the *Allied Assault* team to Activision, EA handed the future of *Medal Of Honor* to its LA studio – the one that had birthed the series in the first place. *Pacific Assault* introduced some intriguing features, like squad commands and the ability to be saved from death by your comrades. But it also marked the start of a decline in quality that led EA to abandon *Medal Of Honor* completely.

BATTLEFIELD 1942

In the beginning, Infinity Ward and DICE weren't direct competitors. The former valued its single-player campaigns above all else, and the latter developed almost exclusively in multiplayer, offering only bot battles as solo diversions. But with *Medal Of Honor*'s fortunes waning, publisher EA increasingly positioned *Battlefield* as a *COD*-killer – especially after acquiring DICE in 2006.

VIETCONG

Publishers were already mindful of the glut of World War II shooters and looking to push into alternate historical settings by 2003. The Vietnam War seemed fertile ground, but reviews of *Vietcong* were mixed, and audiences were unconvinced. Sales were poor in the UK at launch – although the game remained popular in its native Czech Republic long afterwards.

» [PC] You were occasionally tasked with digging out a big gun to deal with a tank.

» [PC] Many players remember Stalingrad and the horribly high cost of victory for the Russians.

» [PC] Controlling a tank was a welcome change of scene, if underdeveloped from a mechanical perspective.

managing the game. But as far as Robert was concerned, Infinity Ward felt like an independent company, with an independent culture. "You wouldn't get the sense that you were working at Activision," he says. "We were insulated from disputes over what was going to happen on the game. That would be Vince and Jason talking with Activision behind closed doors, and we'd be shielded."

To the publisher's credit, it often gave the team space to do their best work. "We weren't getting executives going, 'We want you to put this or that in the game,'" Robert says. "We weren't doing corporate dictates, we were just channelling what we thought was best for the player."

The team at Infinity Ward was already proven, thanks to its work on *Medal Of Honor*. But they were intimidated by EA's series, the monster they'd helped create – not knowing if fans would stick with the name they knew or recognise the pedigree of the team behind *Allied Assault*. "EA had crazy awesome marketing at the time for *Medal Of Honor*," Brad says. "So we would see their commercials coming out, beautiful movie trailer-type things with live action. And we were like, 'Oh, man, that looks so good.'"

As Robert remembers it, the team had been in competition with others for as long as it had existed. "On *Allied Assault*, we were trying to outdo the console *Medal Of Honor*," he says. "For *Call Of Duty*, we were going against EA's *Allied Assault* expansion, *Spearhead*. It's like a bogeyman."

Robert compares the process of pulling *Call Of Duty* together to being in a *Quake* clan.

» [PC] Mission briefings often occurred in-engine, and were delivered by gruffly voice-acted officers.

"Obviously things can go wrong and you start shouting at each other," he says. "And designers are trying to outdo each other with the cool scenes. But you've all got the sense of being on a team working together, pushing each other: 'I'll control that area, you control this.'"

> "ONCE MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT CAME OUT IT WAS LIKE, 'OK, THESE GUYS AREN'T OUR COMPETITION'"
> **ROBERT FIELD**

The push to the end was frantic and exciting. "And then you're just waiting for the reviews to come out," Robert says. "That was the first shot of drugs in the vein." *Call Of Duty* was hailed as a masterpiece, with scores over 90%. "We were just happy that it was well received," Brad says.

The day after launch, Activision acquired Infinity Ward. For a few million dollars, the publisher bagged the studio behind the franchise that has since made it unstoppable. In 2020 alone, *Call Of Duty* made Activision over $3 billion. "They got us for a song," Brad says. "That was a super good business decision."

In 2004, when EA finally did release its answer to *Call Of Duty* "it really wasn't competitive". "We were worried about them because we saw their trailer and they had really cool rendering stuff," Robert says. "But once *Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault* came out it was like, 'OK, these guys aren't our competition.' They didn't have their act together."

By then, Infinity Ward was already turning its attention toward Bungie, which inspired West and the team to drop medikits in favour of regenerating health for *Call Of Duty 2*. "It was obviously based on *Halo*, because they had their shields," Robert says. "You don't want the game to become this treasure hunt for health packs. You want it to be more about the experience of playing than worrying about your last little bit of health."

The shift reflected a growing concern with approachability. If an Infinity Ward designer was right-handed, they were told to test their level using their left, so that their aim would match that of an unseasoned player.

"We were trying to get maximum sales," Robert says. "You're obviously not trying to do a garbage game, but we really were focussing on getting in as many people as possible. We'd get the receptionist doing playtesting, people who hadn't played games before. Each level designer would have to watch the person play their level without any help, and if they were stuck in some spots, the designer would have to try to fix that."

Approachability may have prepared *Call Of Duty* for the big time, but the switch from a historical backdrop to the modern day sealed the deal. "Our designers wanted to push for a new setting, because we were burnt out," Brad says. "As a company, we had made three World War II games, including *Medal Of Honor*. And so we were like, 'Can we change this up? We've been making World War II longer than World War II lasted.'" There was pushback from Activision, who didn't see many successful shooters on the market with contemporary settings, "They really didn't want us to make *Modern Warfare*."

Brad doesn't know what changed the publisher's mind, but the launch of *Modern Warfare* marked Infinity Ward's ascension to the very peak of pop culture. *Call Of Duty* became a water-cooler game, its campaign twists discussed on lunch breaks in schools and offices. It secured the future of the series for many more years to come. "We weren't expecting it," Brad says. "We knew that it was fun, especially the multiplayer – we would stick around late at night and play. But the success of that was ridiculous. It was a cool and fortunate experience – not all companies get to stick together that long." ✱

WARFARE RETURNS

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE HIT SERIES?

Hardcore fans of the series will know that *Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare III*, a reboot of the popular 2011 game, is due to launch 10 November. Following on from the plot of *Modern Warfare II*, it offers various multiplayer modes, an ambitious open-world Zombies mode and new Open Combat Missions, which will offer players multiple ways to approach objectives. More news on its extensive multiplayer will be revealed in *Call Of Duty* NEXT on October 5, with Open Access for PlayStation owners on 6-7 October and an Open Beta from 8-10 October. Crossplay Beta begins on 12-13 October with Early Access and Open Beta from 14-16 October. We'll hopefully see you online (except for Nick of course).

Initial D Arcade Stage Version 3

"SPEEDY SPEED BOY, GASOLINE'S BURNIN'"

» ARCADE » 2004 » SEGA ROSSO

I do love a good bit of wordplay, and after hearing Tom Campbell's plot for a *Gran Turismo* film on the Cultaholic Wrestling podcast, I've been imagining a sitcom featuring human versions of driving games. In one house, Grant Turismo – a chap who takes motorsports very seriously and loves tinkering with his car. In the neighbouring house, wacky old Dave-tona USA, who can be heard singing for miles around whenever he's driving on a sunny day. And if they had to have a reasonable neighbour who gets along with both of them, but invariably ends up suffering for their wacky shenanigans, it'd be Ian-itial D.

Along with Namco's *Wangan Midnight* series, Sega's *Initial D* games represented something of an evolution in the arcade racing scene. *Initial D* has all the arcade sensibilities you could ask for, with an upbeat Eurobeat soundtrack and the kind of drift racing that the franchise is famed for, but thanks to the use of magnetic memory cards it also offers a story mode based on the original manga and the ability to modify and tune your chosen car. This can then be used in one-on-one races against other players. This third version of the game added more cars and tracks, most notably the snowy version of Akina.

Sadly, the memory card had limited appeal in the UK, where most arcade cabinets are located in places like bowling alleys and seaside resorts that you don't visit often. But the bar at the University Of Essex had a cabinet, so I had the ideal circumstances to enjoy the game and got plenty of use out of my memory cards. Well, almost ideal – what I didn't have was any rival racers, as many students seemed to actively resent the machine for having a loud attract mode that played music they hated. The machine unsurprisingly disappeared after a while, but a friend managed to grab me the PSP conversion *Initial D Street Stage* while visiting Japan, so everyone ended up happy.

ADVANTAGE
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OPPONENT
IGGY [AE85]
DRIVER
NTG [CT9A]
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RETRORATED

>> Taito's latest retro compilation hopes to gain our favour with cute kiwis and deadly ninjas this month – will it hold up under scrutiny? We'll also be looking at a couple of new retro books, including an absolute banger from Bitmap Books

» [Switch] We're never likely to turn down a chance to revisit *The NewZealand Story*.

Taito Milestones 2

MILES BETTER, MILES STILL TO GO

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT REVIEWED:** SWITCH
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** NA
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £34.99
- **PUBLISHER:** ININ GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** HAMSTER CORPORATION
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

When we reminisce about great retro-gaming compilations of years gone by, the two *Taito Legends* packages on the PlayStation 2 and Xbox are among our most fondly remembered. They're certainly not perfect, with soft pixels and lack of options relative to today's retro releases, but they were packed with games and offered plenty of bang for your buck. Thinking back to those days, we couldn't help but feel that the original *Taito Milestones* was a little disappointing, offering a somewhat odd selection of ten games.

The good news is that while *Taito Milestones 2* once again offers just ten games, they're a good bunch. Shoot-'em-up fans are well catered for with *Darius II*, *Gun Frontier*, *Kiki Kaikai* and *Metal Black*. The package also includes the firefighting platform game *Ben Bero Beh*, ninja action in *The Legend Of Kage*, cute platformers *Liquid Kids* and *The NewZealand Story*, and the fighting games *Dino Rex* and *Solitary Fighter*.

That's a good spread of genres and while the likes of *Liquid Kids* aren't necessarily as well-known as *The NewZealand Story*, they're equally worthy of your attention. You should naturally expect some brutal difficulty from these arcade games, particularly *The Legend Of Kage*. We found ourselves surprised by *Ben Bero Beh* – it felt very stiff and awkward initially, but once you're used to the way

» [Switch] There's a good array of display options, which is nice.

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Taito Milestones 2* is the follow-up to *Taito Milestones*, a retro compilation comprising previous *Arcade Archives* releases and some new additions. Like the original compilation, this is exclusive to the Switch and is available in both digital and physical form. Also like the original compilation, Taito is avoiding the likes of *Space Invaders* and *Bubble Bobble*.

» [Switch] *Liquid Kids* is cute and colourful, and most importantly well worth your time.

✱PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

Jets 'N' Guns 2

If you're looking for a decent shmup with lots of customisation and a pumping soundtrack, this new offering from Red Art Games is worth trying. Chaotic, but fun.

NICK

Taito Milestones 2

I've developed a slightly weird, compulsive relationship with *Ben Bero Beh* because I like putting out fires in videogames. I need rescuing from myself.

» [Switch] If you're a shoot-'em-up fan and yet to try *Metal Black*, make it a priority.

» [Switch] *Solitary Fighter* just feels like a button-bashing exercise at the best of times.

it controls it's quite an exciting single-screen platformer.

Darius II is presented as its three-screen version, which is a delightful inclusion but one that is certainly better viewed on a large TV than the Switch in handheld mode. The two games that aren't much cop are the fighters – *Solitary Fighter* is an update of the rather naff *Violence Fight* that lets you play as the boss characters, and as much as we love dinosaurs, *Dino Rex* is the game that *Primal Rage* is thankful not to be.

Hamster Corporation is the developer behind the emulation here, and it's rock solid – the company has been pumping out *Arcade Archives* releases for years and clearly knows what it's doing. These essentially are the existing *Arcade Archives* releases for the most part, so you get plenty of game options, reasonable scanline filters, fully configurable controls and online leaderboards. Some options even go above and beyond, like the option to reduce input lag in *Solitary Fighter* for a more responsive experience.

When it comes to complaints, the main thing is that the front end isn't particularly swish. There's a simple menu consisting of ten images which represent the games on offer, and you shouldn't expect any frills like concept art, sound tests or developer interviews. Other than that, *Liquid Kids* and *Dino Rex* are oddly only available in their Japanese forms, but otherwise you'd be hard pressed to argue that there's much to be disappointed with. It's worth noting that three games are currently exclusive to the compilation – *Dino Rex*, *Solitary Fighter* and a clear standout in the form of *Darius II*. The other seven are available as individual digital releases, which cost £6.29 each, so if you're interested in at least five games in this compilation, getting the whole lot makes sense. But some of the games have been available for some time and you may already own them, in which case things become more complex.

This is a compilation that holds up well on its own merits, and it's certainly nice to have things like online leaderboards and display options, but the awkward truth is that other recent retro compilations have conditioned us to expect more. *Taito Milestones 2* offers ten games compared to thirty-two in the full *Capcom Arcade Stadium* package which offers similar features, and Taito's compilation has none of the fascinating historical material of something like *Atari 50*. With all three compilations being offered at a similar price point, Taito's offering feels less than generous.

Having said that, *Taito Milestones 2* has far more hits than misses with eight out of ten being worthy of serious play, and the emulation and options available certainly won't let you down. If you're interested in playing these games, *Taito Milestones 2* represents a fine way to do it – we just can't help thinking that it could have been so much more. ✱

» [Switch] Prehistoric in every way except literally, *Dino Rex* is a true duffer.

✱ WHY NOT TRY

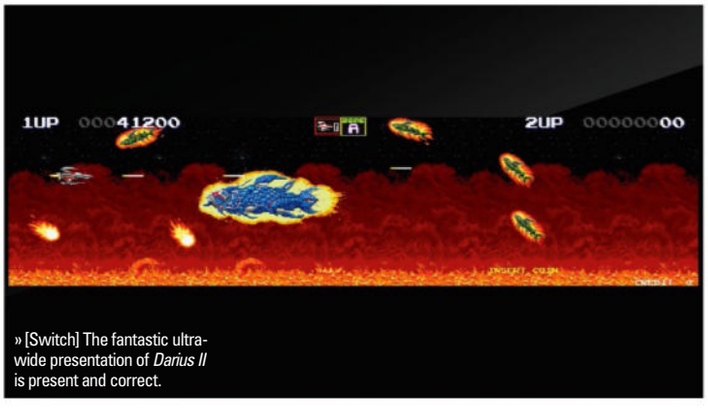
▼ SOMETHING OLD
TAITO LEGENDS 2

▼ SOMETHING NEW
CAPCOM ARCADE 2ND STADIUM

In a nutshell

A welcome step up from the original *Taito Milestones* release, but it still feels stingy compared to the best retro compilations.

» Score **78%**



» [Switch] The fantastic ultra-wide presentation of *Darius II* is present and correct.

PICK OF THE MONTH

The Art Of The Box

» **Buy it from:** bitmapbooks.com » **Buy it for:** £34.99

The latest tome from Bitmap Books is a truly fascinating read that pays tribute to one of gaming's most unappreciated workers – the cover artist. Edited by Steve Jarratt, *The Art Of The Box* is a wonderful look at the works and methods of 26 acclaimed artists, from Steve Hendricks, Julie Bell and Susumu Matsushita to lost legends like Bob Wakelin and Oliver Frey.

While we've always found its *Box Art Collection* series a tad disappointing, Bitmap Books has truly reached for the stars with its latest art book and it's all the better for it. Unlike past books that have relied on (admittedly excellent) photography of the boxed games themselves to convey the art, we've now got actual prints and they look spectacular thanks to the high-quality materials that have been used. The images jump off the pages – effortlessly evoking the original pull they had when they were designed to sell games. The art also acts as a useful timeline, showing how box art has evolved due to new techniques, styles and the different tools that artists have used over the years.

Of equal worth are the excellent interviews, which do a thorough job of covering each artist's career, their own personal techniques and some of their most famous works – or infamous in the case of Marc Ericksson, who was commissioned to create the North American box art for *Mega Man 2*. Many of those interviewed have included behind-the-scenes looks at how they created their craft, from Mike Winterbauer sharing a number of photos of himself posing for specific pieces to David Rowe's concept sketches for *Dandy* and *Bounces*, which all add immensely to the book's value.

The Art Of The Box is quite simply an essential purchase for anyone that loves videogames and wants to learn more about a crucial part of the game-creation process that is rarely talked about. It's filled with interesting anecdotes, and of course, some incredible art and deserves to make its way onto every gamer's coffee table.

» Concept art and comparisons with the finished work can be found throughout *The Art Of The Box*.

» In a nice touch, screenshots of the games the box art was used to sell can be found at the back of the book.

WrestleQuest

» **System:** PC (version tested), PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch » **Buy it for:** £21.99
» **Buy it from:** Online

Muchacho Man Randy Santos, inspired by the legacy of Randy Savage, wants to be the greatest wrestler in the world – but he's an action figure, fighting in a bizarre world of plush toys and Pez dispensers. This RPG's combat system features active elements to keep you engaged and rewards you for incorporating certain dramatic moments into your matches, while the plot allows you to become a villain or a fan favourite. If you're amused by the idea of helping a wrestler choose between a neon-painted surfer gimmick and a goth phase, or the notion of a 141 and two-thirds chance of having fun, this will be your kind of game.

NICK THORPE

» Score **82%**

GameBook

» **Buy it for:** £29.99 » **Buy it from:** nintymedia.net

Fans of Nintendo's Game Boy would do well to seek out Paul Murphy's new book. While it's lacking in interview content and feels a little pricey at £30, it remains an interesting read thanks to Paul's obvious love for the subject matter and some well-chosen aspects of the popular handheld. There are breakdowns of some of the system's biggest franchises and an interesting look at the WorkBoy. Some of the entries don't go in as much detail as we'd like, but they're well-written and most of the Game Boy's biggest games are covered. Special mention needs to go to the gorgeous illustrations that are found throughout the book, as they really help to bring the subject matter to life. There's little here that hardcore fans won't already know and some of the photography is a little disappointing, but this remains a comprehensive look at Nintendo's world-conquering handheld.

DARRAN JONES

Pocket Bravery

» **System:** PC (version tested), PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch
» **Buy it for:** £16.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

This fighter takes inspiration from SNK's classics and it's been a while since we've seen an indie fighting game so packed with features. It boasts ten initially available characters and three more to unlock, plenty of modes including a full Story mode and online play with rollback netcode. The game has sufficient depth and features like frame data for enthusiasts, but also does a lot to explain itself to newcomers and features a simplified control scheme. Unfortunately the CPU is brutal – opponents will escape your throws and hit massive combos from the very first round of Arcade mode, so it's best enjoyed with friends.

NICK THORPE

» Score **80%**

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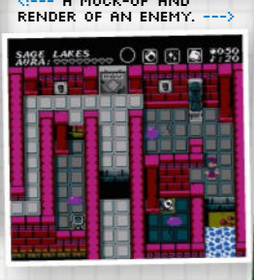
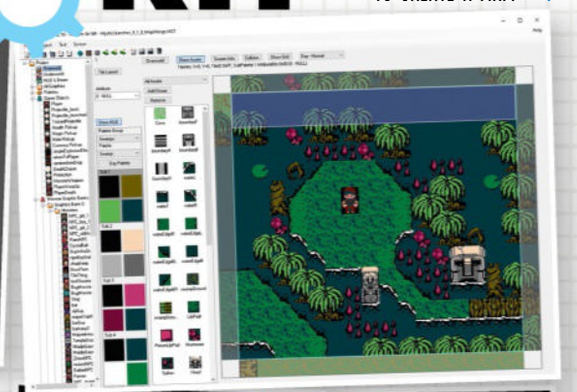
THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>

<!--- [NES] HELP THE BLACKSMITH CRAFT NEW WEAPONS. --->

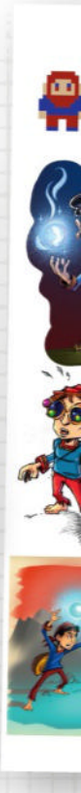
<!--- A MOCK-UP AND RENDER OF AN ENEMY. --->





<!--- USING NESMAKER TO CREATE A MAP. --->

<!--- [NES] THERE IS A FUN CARD GAME TO MASTER IN MYSTIC SEARCHES. --->



<INTRO> THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO MAKE AND DISTRIBUTE HOMEBREW. IF YOU FELL IN LOVE WITH THE NES, CHECK OUT NESMAKER – BEING USED TO CREATE MYSTIC SEARCHES. ASTEBROS IS OUT NOW ON STEAM AND MEGA DRIVE CARTRIDGE, AS WELL AS APPEARING ON EVERCADE LATER THIS YEAR. ITCH.IO HOSTS GAMES FOR DIFFERENT FORMATS, INCLUDING THE WORK OF SPECTRUM ARTIST PUTTYCAD. OR BE LIKE CHAMPION CODER WLS AND HOST YOUR GAMES ON YOUR VERY OWN WEBSITE. </INTRO>

<!--- JOE GRANATO IV TEACHING NES DEVELOPMENT AT NEW ENGLAND INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY WITH RI DIGI. --->

<MAIN HEADER>

MAKING MYSTIC SEARCHES

<INTRO> JOE GRANATO IV DISCUSSES HIS CHILDHOOD DREAM OF MAKING A NES GAME, AND THE NESMAKER UTILITY IT LED TO </INTRO>

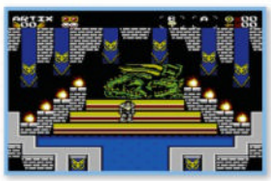
<BODY> **"At seven, videogames became the language by which I experienced science fiction and fantasy," Joe Granato IV tells us.** "Many friends had a NES before me, and I remember being incredibly jealous. I was accessing fantastic worlds through *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Mega Man*, and *Castlevania*. The original sketches for *Mystic Searches* were very derivative of everything I had absorbed, a reflection of the time and place I was growing up."

When Joe rediscovered those sketches, he wanted to make them into a real game. "I started developing in 2014 when no tools existed to do what we wanted to do," he says. "There were a lot of people tinkering away on bits and pieces, but the core team consisted of myself and artist Austin McKinley. We built a sprite editor through a GUI [Graphical User Interface] that spit out that data, we built screens in a GUI we could easily edit."

Joe and Austin soon got additional support. "Programmer Josh Fallon helped with a lot of utilities that were specific to the game we were creating," Joe says. "Before we knew it, we had a development environment with everything needed to create entire games. At every convention where we showed off our game or *The New 8-bit Heroes* documentary (available on Amazon and Blu-ray), people were wanting the tools to create their own games. So we reformed it into NESmaker, now responsible for creating hundreds of new games."

So why should budding coders use NESmaker? "For someone who wants to create NES games but has no idea where to start, NESmaker is a great back door into that world," offers Joe. "You can have your first project on a cartridge within half an hour. NESmaker also provides easy tethers to the 6502 ASM, and advanced users can create entire engines from scratch. There has been a massive update in the queue since before the pandemic; in the coming

JOE'S JOLLIES



DUNGEONS AND DOOMKNIGHTS

<"It's crammed with just the right balance of nostalgic charm and classic NES gameplay – Adam Bohn understood the assignment!"/>

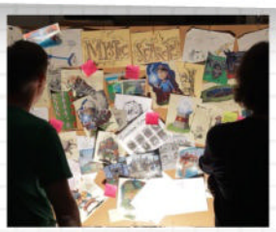
TURTLE PAINT

<"Joe Sherman's 8-bit colouring book, completely outside of what NESmaker was created to do, demonstrates how far the software can be pushed."/>

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- CONCEPTS FOR THE SPIN-OFF COMIC. --->



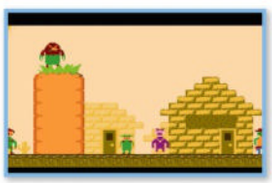
<!--- THE "THOUGHT WALL" OF SKETCHES AND CONCEPTS. --->

<!--- THE WOODGRAIN MYSTIC SEARCHES CARTRIDGE. --->

months, we have exciting things to show!" Joe's dream game, *Mystic Searches* started to take shape in 2017. "Imagine if we'd had these tools at the start! We restructured what existed, truncated it a bit, and made a prequel quest called *Mystic Origins* (released in 2019). That allowed us to open up the capacity for the flagship product *Mystic Searches* to be as cool as we could make it no matter how much time it would take," Joe continues. "You can see the entire history on MysticSearches.com"

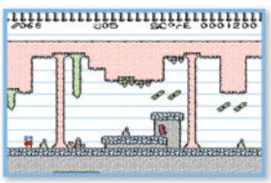
Merchandise is also planned for Joe's dream game. "The woodgrain cartridge was always something I wanted to do," beams Joe. "It's something that people haven't seen before, and just opening the prototype had me giddy. Austin's a comic illustrator, so it seemed inevitable we'd see a comic adaptation. I'm a musician, so of course the score would be arranged for a full orchestra. I hope that the time and effort put into it helps create a real living, breathing world despite the system's constraints." </BODY>

<INTRO> JOE'S FAVOURITE NESMAKER CREATIONS TO DATE </INTRO>



KUBO 3

<"Created by Dale Coop's son SJ and with an official release through Limited Run Games – it shows NES development is about more than nostalgia."/>

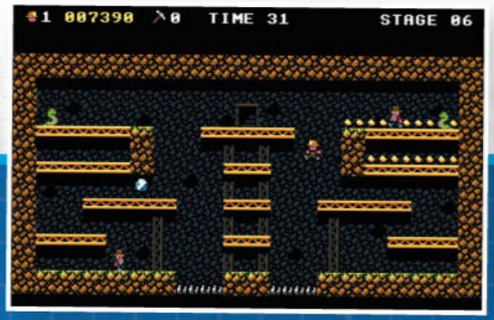


DOODLE WORLD

<"It's a familiar feeling, a simple platformer that invokes the imagination of a kid with its [distinctive] graphic style."/>

MYSTIC ORIGINS

<"It's the one that started the whole thing, after all. Set in the same world of Myrinda, the daydreams of an eight-year-old child."/>



NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

<**Amiga:** The Swords & Sorcery AmiGameJam has now ended. Expect more coverage soon, but head here for the meantime: itch.io/jam/amigamejam/>

<**Apple II**: *Million Perfect Tiles*, based on Takuzu puzzles, from A2_4am, supports 64K memory, mouse and Mockingboard sound. Find it at bit.ly/million-perfect-tiles/>

<**Atari 2600**: Development continues porting *Space Taxi*. Follow the progress at bit.ly/spacetaxi-atariage/>

<**Atari XL/XE**: At Lost Party 2023, Krzysztof Swiecicki released *Doom* – inspired by Kweepa's VIC-20 version. Its features include automap, converted MIDI soundtracks and DOS sounds, multiple weapons, and plenty of levels. Download it at moodler.pl/doom.zip/>

<**C64**: The latest arcade-inspired title from LC-Games is *Dig Dug Revival*, with improved graphics and procedurally generated levels. Go digging for it at bit.ly/digdug-revival/>

<**DOS:** Juan Martinez released *Gold Mine Run* (top), his entry for the DOS Game Jam 2023. Visit bit.ly/goldminerun to download, and bit.ly/making-goldminerun for the making of videos./>

<**Intellivision**: New digital ROMs from intellivisioncollector.com by William Moeller (*Elektronite*) include Jeff Minter's *Hover Bovver, Miner 2049'er* by Bill Hogue, and *Steamroller* (based on David Rolfe's unreleased ColecoVision game)./>

<**Master System:** Louis The Sega Nerd released *Sub-Assault* and the two-player *Line Runner*. Find them both at louistheseganerd.itch.io/>

<**ZX Spectrum**: Amebatron Software released *Speccy Quiz* in English and Spanish, mixing platform action with trivia questions on classic Spectrum games. Give it a whirl at bit.ly/speccyquiz-english
Allan Turvey of Midnight Brew Games launched *Lunar Rescue RX*, his Spectrum adaptation of the early Taito arcade game. It's available at bit.ly/lunarrescuerx/>

CHAMPION CODER

LÁSZLÓ RAJCSÁNYI (WLS)

<INTRO> LÁSZLÓ HAS CREATED MANY COMMODORE 16 REMAKES AND ORIGINAL TITLES FOR THE GAME BOY </INTRO>

<INFO BY: FROM: HUNGARY WEBSITES: WLS.HU LACOSTE42.ITCH.IO FORMAT: GAME BOY / GAME BOY COLOR PREVIOUS GAME: MUSICAL NOTES (GBC), NINJA MASTER (GBC) WORKING ON: TOM THUMB (GBC) />

WHEN DID YOU START WRITING GAME BOY HOMEBREW GAMES?

<In 2020, I saw a very rudimentary version of GBStudio. I really liked it and then I wrote my first game, *Treasure Island GB*. I really like that it's a system bound to limits and you must use a lot of tricks graphically to make the game more enjoyable. They are constantly improving the system because a lot of things are added that make it even more usable. Today, I would also make the old games differently, because when I made them, many new developments were not yet available./>

<!--- LÁSZLÓ'S TYNESOFT C16 COLLECTION FOR GAME BOY COLOR EARNED 82% IN ISSUE 242'S REVIEW. --->

HOW DID YOU START CONVERTING C16 GAMES?

<The first [GBStudio] only handled 16x16 sprites. Since I'm not very good at drawing, I used other graphics to learn. Having grown up with a C16, I reached for that, these old beloved games. Then I saw that they look very good on Game Boy too, and that's how I fell in love with it./>

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVOURITE GAME TO CONVERT?

<I like the ones that don't deviate too much from the original. I like simpler games where I immediately know what the goal is, like *Aardvark* or *Leaper*. But the real favourite for me is *Finders Keepers*./>

IS THERE A GAME YOU WANT TO CONVERT?

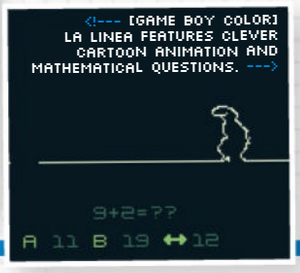
<*Tom Thumb* is considered by many to be the masterpiece of Kingsoft's Udo Gertz. However, for this, I still need to learn the new GBStudio./>

WHAT INSPIRED MUSICAL NOTES?

<We bought my wife a piano, she played only Bach all day because it is the easiest for beginners. That's why I had the sheet music and I thought I'd make the music for Game Boy, and it would be good for something. This is how the idea of having composers in the game was born. The pictures were on the internet, I just had to convert them to 1-bit and redraw them a little to make them look nicer. />

<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] THE NINJA MASTER DEFENDS HIMSELF WITH A LARGE SWORD. --->

<!--- [PC] CREATING MUSICAL NOTES INSIDE GBSTUDIO. --->



<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] LA LINEA FEATURES CLEVER CARTOON ANIMATION AND MATHEMATICAL QUESTIONS. --->

DATA BURST

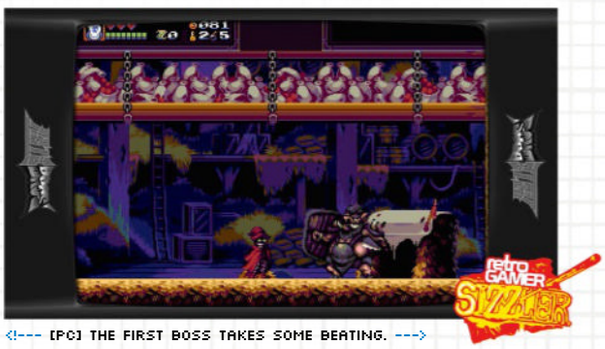
ASTEBROS

<INFO FORMAT: MEGA DRIVE / STEAM / SWITCH (TO BE RELEASED) CREDITS: NEOFID STUDIOS PRICE: DIGITAL ROM €17.99 / STEAM £14.29 / CARTRIDGE FROM €59 / SWITCH TBC WEB: NEOFID-STUDIOS.COM/ AND BIT.LY/ASTEBROS _ STEAM />

<BODY> **The prequel to Neofid's *Demons Of Asteborg* sees three heroes – the knight, the ranger and the mage – set out to discover the treasure of Asteborg.** After a short tutorial sequence, the heroes set up camp which leads to the main adventure. From here you choose a hero to tackle the next procedurally-generated dungeon, either on your own or with a second player. If you die in the dungeon its locations rearrange, but you can handily find a map during a run to show where items and the boss are located.

Chests reveal extra coins, keys, materials, weapons, and scrolls, so hunt them out when you can. Each hero also has a special skill to be mastered. Defeating enemies and breaking objects will give you coins and materials, which will again aid your quest. Freeing prisoners held in the dungeons will see them join the camp to give extra options – such as the blacksmith to forge stronger weapons, and the merchant to sell extra items. Defeating the boss releases a power orb, which improves the character's stats. This is a great game, but a challenging one, with bosses being particularly tough and enemies constantly swarming you. But as with any roguelike, practice is everything and you'll quickly extend your runs. Boasting gorgeous graphics, detailed animation and incredible sound, *Astebros* is a fantastic take on the popular subgenre. Don't miss it. </BODY>

SCORE: 90%



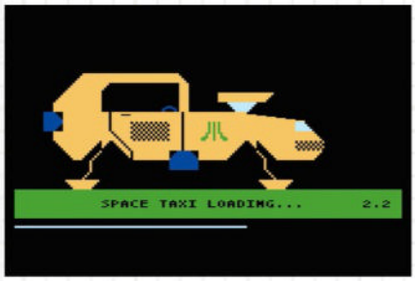
<!--- [PC] THE FIRST BOSS TAKES SOME BEATING. --->

<!--- [PC] THE KNIGHT CAN OPEN THIS GIANT CHEST BY BASHING IT REPEATEDLY. --->

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- [ATARI XL] HEY TAXI! THE SCORE PANEL WILL TELL YOU THE DESTINATION AS WELL AS THE SPEECH. --->



<!--- [ATARI XL] THE LOADING SCREEN RECREATES THE PETSCII SCREEN OF THE C64 GAME. --->

SPACE TAXI

<INFO FORMAT: ATARI XL (64K MINIMUM, 128K REQUIRED FOR SAMPLED SPEECH) CREDITS: ANDREA CUCHETTO PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD WEB: BIT.LY/SPACETAXI-XL />

<BODY> **Recreated with the permission of John F Kutcher, this is a well-made conversion of the C64 cult classic.** In *Space Taxi* you can take on a short 12-hour day or night shift, sign up for the entire 24 hours, or play the levels in random order. Fly your space taxi to the passenger, hear them say their destination (if you have 128K) and then work out how to fly them there – without colliding with hazards, the platforms or running out of fuel. The increasing difficulty and clever layouts are represented well, and the audio does a decent job. The speech is a little rougher but still a clever technical achievement for the machine. It may be shift work but this is still a very enjoyable game. </BODY>

SCORE: 88%

<!--- [PLUS/4] THE OUTLINE MAP BEFORE EACH LEVEL SHOWS THE TARGET PERCENTAGE TO SAVE AND THE TIME AVAILABLE. --->

<!--- [PLUS/4] THIS EARLY LEVEL JUST REQUIRES THE USE OF BLOCKERS. --->

LEMMINGS

FORMAT: PLUS/4 CREDITS: TCFS (CODE), CSABO (MUSIC), UNREAL (GRAPHICS) PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD WEB: BIT.LY/LEMMINGS_PLUS4

<!--- [PLUS/4] FUNCTION KEYS AND HELP CHANGE THE SETTINGS. --->

<BODY> **Released at the Arok 2023 demoparty, this is a brilliant conversion of the classic Amiga game.** Although it lacks the famous introduction, the menu does give the choice of Fun, Tricky or Taxing levels. The lemmings receive their skills by using keys 1-8 or simply moving the cursor to the relevant icon. It's surprisingly elegant, giving you plenty of time to focus on saving those lovable critters. *Lemmings* has well-made graphics, excellent tunes and some great sound FX, but no speech. The familiar levels are carefully recreated and the end result is an impressive port of a superb game. </BODY>

SCORE: 90%

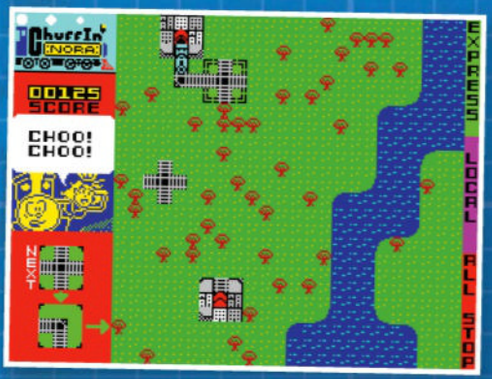
PROCESSING

<INTRO> COMING SOON TO PUTTYCAD. ITCH.IO, ARTIST RIC LUMB (PUTTYCAD) IS DEVELOPING NINE SPECTRUM GAMES, INCLUDING CHUFFIN' NORA </INTRO>

<BODY> **"When I was a kid, I used to draw on my brother's ZX Spectrum,"** Ric Lumb tells us. "My favourite tools are pencil and paper (I made my own set of squared jotters for drawing sprites) and I make mock-ups using Aseprite." Ric creates games with three different programming friends. "With Jeff Murray (PsychicParrot) I'm working on *Gherbert In The Garden*. The first *Gherbert* was very popular, so we have always wanted to make it a trilogy. With Nigel Critten (100TinSoldiers), we're currently working on *Babyman Vs The Terminatots*, a flip-screen beat-'em-up with weapon pick-ups.

"Rich Hanson (RichPea) sent me an idea for a train-track game. We've gone with the name *Chuffin Nora* as we like to inject childish British humour and puns into everything we create. I'm also doing a side project with my son Tommy, who's really into Eighties horror now. *Scream Queen* has you playing the final girl in a nightmare dream world of horror cliches with levels and characters loosely based on the movies we all love." </BODY>

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] HERE'S A SELECTION OF THE MANY GREAT GAMES THAT RIC HAS MADE OR IS WORKING ON. WE LIKE THE SOUND OF BABYMAN VS THE TERMINATOTS. --->



<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] "IN CHUFFIN' NORA, NORA IS THE NAME OF THE TRAIN, AND YOU DELIVER TRACK PIECES BY DRONE," RIC SAYS. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

» [Xbox 360] *Hexic HD* was preinstalled on all Xbox 360s meaning everyone should be familiar with it.

XBOX LIVE ARCADE

The team look back at Microsoft's digital triumph

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

» [Xbox 360] Not all Xbox Live Arcade games will be lost. *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* will remain available, for example.

With the recent news that the Xbox 360 online store will be closing down in 2024, the team decided it was time to look back at Microsoft's ambitious digital service.

DARRAN

What's everyone's first memory of Xbox Live Arcade?

NICK

I can remember seeing news about the original Xbox version and being quite excited, because I wanted to play *Mutant Storm*. I didn't actually get to try it until the Xbox 360 version though – the first game I got was *Undertow* as an apology for network outages.

TIM

I was quite slow getting an Xbox 360, so it was the Summer Of Arcade 2009 and playing *Shadow Complex*, a pretty nifty Metroidvania.

DARRAN

I remember *Shadow Complex*, a great game. I must have had Xbox Live Arcade on Xbox as I was online all the time, but I can't remember. What I do remember is that it was somewhat mad to be able to play the likes of *Robotron: 2084*, *Super Sprint* and *Pac-Man* on the service, even if some versions were better than others. Did anyone else enjoy any of the retro classics on Live Arcade?

NICK

I didn't get loads of them, but I did buy *Virtua Fighter 2* when it came up. But I only bought that because I had to buy Microsoft Points (remember those?) in bulk and had some left over from buying what I'd actually wanted.

TIM

Nothing specifically, but one time Sega gave me a load of codes for various retro games. I was mindlessly putting in the codes, redeeming them and not really paying attention… and accidentally bought *Altered Beast*. D'oh!

DARRAN

Sega actually released a lot of great stuff on the service, including *Daytona USA*, *OutRun Online Arcade* and *After Burner: Climax*. What a shame most of them are delisted now. Is anyone actually planning to grab any of the delisted games before they disappear next year?

NICK

Yes, but where possible I'll be looking for the physical compilations that include the games I want instead of buying digitally – *Capcom Digital Collection* is one I'm looking to grab, for example.

TIM

I've either played most of them or I'm not interested in what's left. However, *Lost Odyssey* is on that list and I never finished that. I was quite enjoying it at the time and I'm not sure why I stopped playing. It was probably someone else's copy and they took it back.

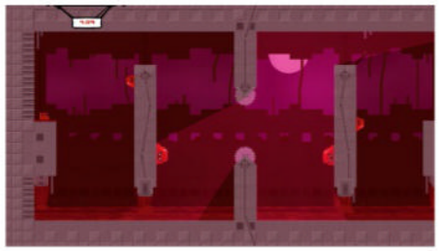
DARRAN

You're safe with *Lost Odyssey* as it's backwards compatible. And it's a physical release. That's why this closure feels a little different, as quite a few games from the early years are still available. Still, you can't talk about Xbox Live Arcade without mentioning Summer Of Arcade. Is it me, or did Microsoft go huge on that?

NICK

It sure did. I had limited internet

> "I was mindlessly putting in the codes, redeeming them and not really paying attention. . . and accidentally bought Altered Beast. D'oh!"
>
> TIM EMPEY



» [Xbox 360] *Super Meat Boy* made a huge noise on Xbox Live Arcade back in 2010.

» [Xbox 360] Darran enjoyed his time playing *Braid*, but Nick wasn't too keen on it.

access for the first one in 2008, and everyone was going nuts for *Braid*. I finally tried it and felt very strongly that the emperor was naked – I'm so pleased every Xbox Live Arcade game had to have a demo.

DARRAN

Having a demo was an amazing idea. I bet that annoyed a lot of developers. Did you have any Summer Of Arcade favourites, Tim?

TIM

I got really hyped for *Trials HD*, but then got infuriated with my lack of skills in it. It was nice playing *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* again though.

DARRAN

Marvel Vs Capcom 2, another we'll be sadly losing. I was rather partial to *Limbo* and the aforementioned *Shadow Complex*. I think it's worth mentioning *Games Room* as well. That was an amazing concept, but it never quite worked out.

NICK

The idea of a virtual arcade was really cool, but it didn't even last a year did it? But it's amazing how Xbox Live Arcade transformed over the years – it went from being for games under 50MB by indie studios, to something that every publisher eventually embraced.

DARRAN

It's a shame Microsoft dropped the name with Xbox One, but it was obviously becoming something far bigger by then. I loved the versatility of its library, the fact you could play games like *Sensible Soccer* and *Double Dragon* online with your mates and its large number of shmups.

TIM

There were a lot of games on it but I never delved into it. I had shiny new games to play.

DARRAN

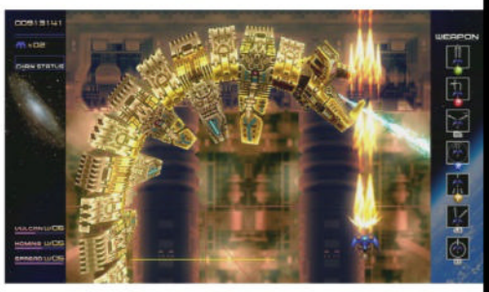
See, I actually found myself playing lots, but that's probably because we reviewed so many in the mag.

NICK

It's an odd one – we got an affordable way to play *Radiant Silvergun*, but Xbox Live Arcade also arguably started the decline of retro compilations. I can't decide if it was a good thing overall.

DARRAN

Arguably a good thing for publishers, not so much for consumers. What a shame.



» [Xbox 360] The Xbox 360 version of *Radiant Silvergun* remains the cheapest way to play Treasure's acclaimed shmup.

» [Xbox 360] Sadly, games like *Omega 5* are long delisted, but you can still play it on Series S and X if you own it.

» [Xbox 360] Games like *Pac-Man Championship Edition* shone on Microsoft's online service.

XBOX LIVE ARCADE GEMS

Readers share their favourite digital games

Retro Gamer Den
Geometry Wars is an all-time classic, but I think for me it has to be either *Fez* or *OutRun Online Arcade*, simply because it's *OutRun*. Who doesn't love *OutRun*?

Steven Briggs
Boom Boom Rocket had a terrific and very catchy electro classical soundtrack combined with trippy/beautiful explosions. Game was very responsive, you could be as casual or as deep in this game as you wanted.

Robert Augest de Meijer
Super Street Fighter II HD Remix. Still the best version of *Street Fighter II*, and would have still been a tournament staple if it was released in Japan. The improvements to each character are fantastic!

VirtuaOllie64
Hydro Thunder: Hurricane is an insanely fun racer. But also I had so many great times with *Marble Blast Ultra*, *Brothers*, *Costume Quest*, *Limbo*... and that's not counting how awesome it was for retro ports too! And every single game had a demo! Still my favourite online marketplace ever.

Big Bang Blitz
Death Tank. It's like ye olde *Death Tank Zwei* with added online modes with a lot more technique to it, pleasing visual flourishes, lots of options and even some secrets.

Jason
Sensible World Of Soccer. The greatest football game of all time was brought back for eight quid with tidied up graphics. I've gone so far as to have it installed on my Xbox One and Series X as it's that good.

Steven
It's gotta be *Geometry Wars* for me as it gave me the feeling of wanting to chase a high score every time I played. And it was addictive and challenging! I definitely miss it.

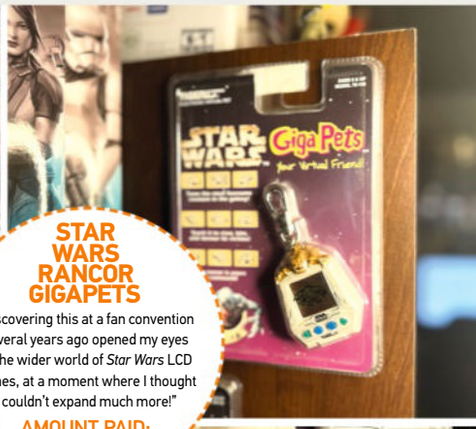
Chris F
Marble Blast Ultra, shaving milliseconds off your times to beat your mates on the Xbox Live leaderboard was peak online gaming in 2006!

Tim Mossey
Geometry Wars. Also a shout for *Cloning Clyde*, which seems to be a game that's almost forgotten about these days.

James
Bionic Commando Rearmed was an amazing remake of the NES game. I loved every minute of it – great art style and the control was spot on. It overshadowed the new 3D entry in the series that it was developed to promote.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

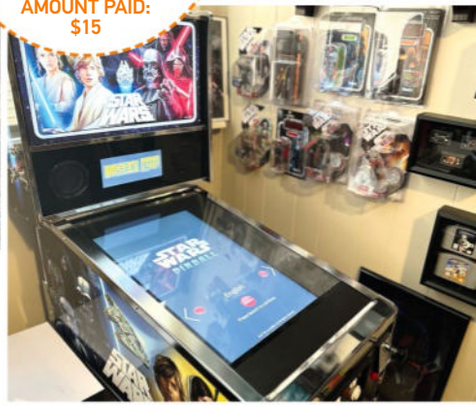
READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**



STAR WARS RANCOR GIGAPETS

"Discovering this at a fan convention several years ago opened my eyes to the wider world of *Star Wars* LCD games, at a moment where I thought I couldn't expand much more!"

AMOUNT PAID: $15



BIO

NAME:
Jordan Maison

LOCATION:
Mansfield, Texas

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
$2,000

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Nintendo Switch

FAVOURITE GAME:
Knights Of The Old Republic

TWITTER:
@JordanMaison

GALAXY QUEST

Feel the force of Jordan Maison's Star Wars collection

While our latest reader collects all sorts of videogames, Jordan Maison has a particular interest in anything related to the *Star Wars* universe. "One of the things I love most about *Star Wars* is the potential," he tells us. "It's a giant sandbox that allows all kinds of storytellers to have fun without 'breaking the rules.'"

As with many collectors, Jordan's collection started out when he was younger, although it initially focussed on *Star Wars* toys. "I was collecting Star Wars in general before I started picking up the games, and now *Star Wars* gaming is a major area of my collection," he says. "The gaming side of my collection came about pretty gradually. I started hoarding toys and such when I was younger, and was aware of *Star Wars* games existing, and even had the brutally hard JVC *Star Wars* Game Boy title."

Jordan started acquiring more games as he got older, and recalls a pivotal turning point when he turned 13 years old. "Several family members pooled their money together to get me the Nintendo 64 *Episode 1: Racer* console bundle for my birthday," he says. "I loved it and played it every day. It was also the only N64 game I had for a long time, but it's a memory that remains special for me."

That memory has led to Jordan amassing a large number of games. "If we're talking just traditional videogames, I'm sitting at about 91," he says. "If we're including some of the LCD handheld games, that's over 100 and that's not including the *Arcade 1-Up* pinball table or the augmented reality *Jedi Challenges* headset/sabers I have."

With such a big interest in the franchise nowadays, we wondered if prices were becoming prohibitive. "Oh yeah, there are a few *Star Wars* games that are going for quite a bit these days," Jordan says, pointing out the big arcade cabinets and the Japanese version of *Super Star Wars: Return Of The Jedi* as examples. "The Limited Run Games *Collector Editions* are also pretty sought after. But of course, the rarest of them all is *Return Of The Jedi: Ewok Adventure* for Atari 2600. The game was completed but never released and only one physical copy exists. If you're talking about Holy Grails, that's it right there!"

Holy Grails aside, Jordan still feels it's not too late to start collecting *Star Wars* games. "Many of the games will range between $20 to $60 on average, which is kind of nice," he continues. "It's not completely prohibitive to get started with collecting *Star Wars* games, and it's easy enough to find most of the basic/core games." Ultimately, Jordan's most important advice when it comes to collecting is fairly simple. "Have fun," he says. "Collect because something in the process brings you joy. Whether it's the thrill of finding a game you need in an unlikely spot, or the contentment of clicking that last piece into your shelf. Collecting should make you happy. There might be frustrations along the way, but it shouldn't be the norm."

Jordan also feels he knows the secret of a good *Star Wars* game. "Beyond the graphics and even gameplay, capturing the essence of the pulp sci-fi is what makes a *Star Wars* game standout from the crowd."

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

TIE FIGHTER
STAR WARS
Starfighter Plus
TECHNICAL DATA
OPERATIONAL USE
TIE FIGHTER
The Sequel To X-Wing By
Lawrence Holland & Edward Kilham
STAR WARS: TIE FIGHTER
"I never actually got to play this game when it was released (but have now thanks to Steam bundles). I love having this original floppy-disk set."
AMOUNT PAID: $10
STAR WARS EPISODE 1: RACER
"The game that propelled me into collecting the rest, *Racer* is still a blast to play to this day. This is still the original I got in the bundle as a kid."
AMOUNT PAID: GIFT
STAR WARS SHADOWS OF THE EMPIRE
STAR WARS EPISODE I RACER
STAR WARS
STAR WARS BATTLE PASS

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

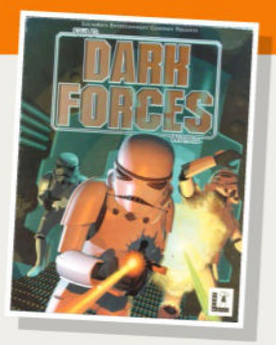
XBOX 360 LIMITED EDITION KINECT STAR WARS BUNDLE

■ "This thing is just insanely cool, and the level of detail they put into every aspect of this edition (even the "Help me Obi-Wan Kenobi" quote printed on the disc tray when you open it), still makes other themed consoles pale in comparison."

PAID: $450

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices



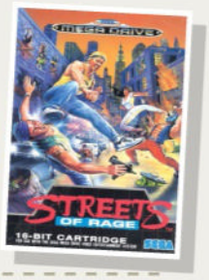
THE COVER STAR

STAR WARS: DARK FORCES

There are numerous PC editions of LucasArts' classic FPS and most go for under **£15.** The PAL PlayStation version is a little more expensive and can reach **£30** if it's complete.

KATAKIS

Rainbow Arts' shooter fetches high prices, with one recently selling for over **£124.** The *Denaris* edition is equally pricey, with a recent copy selling for **£149.**



STREETS OF RAGE

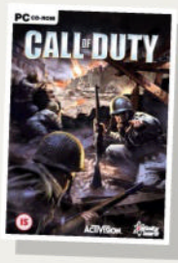
You shouldn't have to pay more than **£25** for a complete PAL edition of Sega's classic side-scrolling brawler. We've seen the Japanese version (*Bare Knuckle*) occasionally go as high as **£90,** but **£30** to **£40** is more usual.

GRADIUS COLLECTION

If you like the look of Konami's popular series, this PSP collection is the cheapest way to own many of the games. If you look around, you should be able to get a complete copy for no more than **£35.**

CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES

Konami's 2D remake isn't cheap. PAL copies range from **£75** to **£145,** while the US version can reach **£170.** A Japanese copy is your best option, but that's still going to be **£80** to **£95.**



CALL OF DUTY

The success of Infinity Ward's game means it's very easy to obtain. If you're paying more than **£5** you're paying too much.

HOGS OF WAR

The cheapest way to enjoy *Hogs Of War* is on PC where it rarely hits a tenner. If you want the PAL PlayStation version you'll be looking at **£30,** or as much as **£50** for the variant that includes *Worms*.

SUPER PAC-MAN

Namco's early *Pac-Man* game is on a variety of compilations, with the most recent being *Pac-Man Museum+*, which didn't get a physical release in the UK. Otherwise you can buy it digitally for **£6.29** as part of Hamster's *Arcade Archives* series.

HOW MUCH?!

SUPER STAR WARS: RETURN OF THE JEDI

We knew the last game in the *Super Star Wars* series was desirable, but **£529** seems a lot of cash. What's more interesting is there's a bunch of other versions on sale for around the **£350** mark, suggesting this could be an outlier.

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

DOWNSIZING

Darran sells off a chunk of his collection

Earlier in the year I mentioned I wanted to start whittling my collection down as I had close to 1,600 physical games. I don't enjoy selling games online so I decided to head to the London Gaming Market to save some hassle. My wife Melanie and youngest daughter Alice decided to come with me, so it became a family day out.

The worst part was obviously working out what stuff I wanted to sell. I looked at the collections for each of my systems in turn and forced myself to lop at least 10% off its current size. The only things I didn't touch were my NTSC N64 games. Everything else was fair game and I brutally stripped down my Wii U, Wii, 3DS, DS and Xbox libraries. Which to be honest, was actually quite cathartic.

Then it was the laborious task of pricing everything up. I'd been to the market pre-COVID in 2019 and had done quite well for myself. Most of my success then was because I seemed to have lower prices than everyone else there so I tried the same tactic. I priced all of my PAL games lower than what CEX sold them for, but higher than the trade value they offered, which felt like a good compromise.

I had a lot more NTSC stuff to sell so that was simply a case of going £10 to £25 cheaper than eBay. I'd noticed last time that many sellers actually put their prices up, which didn't really make sense to me at the time, but does highlight the power of FOMO. I guess buyers are worried that they won't find the items they want so they grab them as soon as they see them.

The day finally arrived, so we quickly set up and waited for the doors to open. There was a little bit of time beforehand to look around the other stalls so I went on the search for a NTSC copy of *Castlevania: Legacy Of Darkness*, a game that's shot up to around £700 whenever it appears on Ebay UK. I didn't find it (much to the relief of Melanie) but I did see a lot of cool stuff. Amazingly, I resisted buying anything – my focus was on selling.

> "People were flashing around £50 notes like they were confetti"
>
> **DARRAN JONES**

With my games loaded in trays I began to have second thoughts because my stall looked a little pathetic compared to most of the others. After all, it was essentially odds and sods from my own personal collection. Surely, if I didn't want it, would anyone else? I became convinced I'd have a hard time selling my games. I needn't have worried…

The first three hours were absolute carnage and it's easily where I made most of my sales. People were flashing around £50 notes like they were confetti and it was clear that there were some big spenders there. Alice didn't enjoy it at all because it was so noisy, so she retreated to the back of the stall and played on her Switch, but Mel loved it and began acting like she was a seasoned market seller.

A lot of people commented on my low prices and wanted to know why I was so cheap. I explained that I wasn't there for profit but to simply clear some space from my own personal collection. That's not to say I didn't have high-end items to sell though. Mel was gobsmacked when my sealed Wii U copy of *Project Zero: Maiden Of Dark Water* sold for £180 within the first 20 minutes and a few other similarly priced items were sold by the day's end.

When it got to 2pm I dropped all my prices by 10% and then went to 20% at 3pm, but it was very quiet compared to earlier in the day. Tired out, but pleased with how the day went and the many readers and Twitter friends I met, we headed home and had a takeaway – my treat, of course. Although I'd taken less games than in 2019 the price of retro games has increased significantly and Mel was staggered by our final take.

While I've used some of the money to buy some high-end PlayStation games I've always wanted to own, a significant part paid for an amazing long weekend in Edinburgh to celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary and we're also planning to go away at the end of the year as well. It's never easy letting go of stuff, but it has enabled me to create some much-needed space, acquire some personal grails and give my wife a fantastic holiday. For me, that makes it all worth it.

HOW TO SELL GAMES

TIPS FOR CASHING IN AT GAME MARKETS

PRICE SENSIBLY
It's always nice to make a profit, but dropping your PAL prices below CEX and your NTSC prices below eBay will net plenty of sales.

BE SURE TO HAGGLE
Prospective buyers love getting a deal, so don't be afraid to offer one - you may not get another chance.

TAKE FRIENDS
These events can get very busy and theft sometimes happens. The more eyes on your stall the better.

GRADUALLY REDUCE PRICES
Offering big discounts later in the day is a great way to ensure your stall stays busy.

BUY WITH INTENT
You can visit other stalls before the market opens. Save your money by making a list of items beforehand and doggedly sticking to it.

MEL DRINKING IN EDINBURGH'S HARRY POTTER ATMOSPHERE

EDINBURGH WAS STUNNING AND WE'RE NOW PLANNING A RETURN TRIP.

MEL AND I MADE GOOD USE OF THAT SOLD COPY OF PROJECT ZERO. CHEERS!
HERE'S WHAT SOME OF MY SALES BOUGHT. I'VE WANTED HARMFUL PARK FOR AGES.
READY FOR BUSINESS AT THE LONDON GAMING MARKET.
MOST OF MY LEFTOVERS WENT STRAIGHT TO CEX OR EBAY, I HAVE A FRACTION OF THESE NOW.
HERE'S THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE STUFF I TOOK. IN TOTAL IT WAS JUST UNDER 200 GAMES.

PRUNING TIME

Why readers downsize their game collections

Nova
After moving house twice with my collection at its peak, I decided, "Never again" and started to off-load games I had no intention of playing or no connection to. So basically, beer money and shelf space!

Johnny
I sold my collection and bought recording equipment. I produced some albums and had a great time. I love having more free space as well. I made the money back but not much more, but it's snowballed into a healthy career. FPGA tech made it possible to let go.

Mike P
I sold 90% of my stuff to buy other bits I wanted and to concentrate on one console. It allowed me to get bits that would have been out of my range and have some focus.

Martin Gams
Yes I made a stupid mistake years ago and sold my Sega CD collection because a girl told me to rent a flat... young stupid boy I was... but I learned my lesson.

Carl-Henrik
I got rid of most of my consoles (including two GameCubes, Wii, Wii U, PS3 etc) and a bunch of games when I moved from Los Angeles to Sweden. I couldn't sell everything, so some stuff had to go to recycling...

RetroBob
I focussed my collection on consoles I was truly interested in. It stopped me buying for the sake of it. [Good advice -Ed]

RetroDan
I sold my entire retro collection about ten years ago due to space and the missus moaning about it. I have been rebuilding over the past five years or so but have used modern solutions for a lot of the games rather than physical copies.

pwrdwnsys
I sold my entire Super Famicom collection in 2005 to put towards house moving costs. I've deeply regretted it ever since.

Chris
I had a fairly decent retro collection a few years ago. I sold it all because it was just sitting on a shelf and not being used. It was nice to look at but I decided what's the point in owning it if I wasn't using it. Plus, I found it quite cathartic to have a clear-out.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of one of our classic retro books. Good luck everyone!

STAR LETTER

CASHING OUT

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I have a lot of older games I wouldn't mind selling, including mint-condition Nintendo 64 games, GBA games and a mixture of some rarer games for other consoles. I even have a lot of random collectables I am happy to part with too.

I am really not sure where to start though. Is the best place to go eBay? I am a bit worried about trying to pack cardboard game boxes and putting them in the post as I doubt they will turn up in good condition. I read in this month's magazine a brief bit about the London Gaming Market in the letters page – is this a viable option? I know there are retro-gaming shops and I am willing to take a hit on price if they could be collected.

Any tips would be greatly appreciated. Happy 250th!
Simon Davis

We do often focus more on buying than selling, but we know how to shift things when the time comes. If you don't mind doing a lot of work, eBay is where you'll maximise your money. Cardboard boxes can indeed be damaged in transit, so package them in sturdy boxes, charge appropriate postage and highlight any prior damage in both your pictures and item description. If you don't mind holding on to your games for a while and have appropriate transport, gaming markets can be great – your buyers will be able to inspect condition themselves and you can adjust your prices to clear games as the day goes on (read more on page 106). Some traders will collect, and this is the easiest option but you're right to expect a hit on price – sometimes quite a large one. If you've got time, put together a list of what you've got and email it to potential interested parties to get some ballpark figures.

» When selling online, showing that your game is complete is attractive to buyers.

» We'd even advise sturdy packaging for games in plastic boxes to avoid damage like this happening.

» [Xbox] This scenic drift, or the cliff jump in *Strider*? For Darran, it's honestly too close to call.

OUTRUNNING THE PAST

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Issue 250! Hang on… never mind this landmark edition and set aside the deepest of dives into a beloved games developer. Stop the press. Stop everything! Darran's favourite game of all time is no longer *Strider*? I don't buy a retro magazine every month to have life's certainties up-ended, for goodness sake.
Dominic
PS: Thanks for the years of joy and here's to the next 250 issues!

We're surprised that you're the first one to pick up on it, Dominic – covering *OutRun 2* and its updates in issue 247 convinced Darran that it was time for a change, and *Strider* lost the coveted slot in issue 248. We never expected that one constant on the Welcome page to be replaced, but it is a great game. [I still love *Strider* - Ed]

PIXEL PILGRIMAGE

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
During my first trip to Kyoto, the first place I visited was the former Nintendo office, and it charmed me with its architecture. This is where the company started to manufacture playing cards. At the time it was called Marufuku Co Ltd and was built a century ago. Visiting it is like a 'Mecca' for Nintendo collectors. What other 'sacred places' do you think retro game lovers can and should visit?
Nikita Shigov

Those are cool photos, thanks for sharing them, Nikita. Few places are easily accessible – you can't, for example, just stroll up to the barns at Rare due to the security. But there's a blue plaque at the old Newsfield office in Ludlow where *Crash* and *Zzap!* were made, and we've often wanted to visit the real-life street that inspired the Esaka stage in *The King Of Fighters '98*. Readers, do you have any suggestions?

» Here's a better look at the building itself – it's tiny, given what would come later.

» Nikita at the old Marufuku building, with classic *Pokémon* games in hand.

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» [PS2] We hope you enjoyed the *GTA Vice City* feature in issue 250 too.

PASSION REIGNITED

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I would like to say a big thanks to all you guys making this fantastic magazine and I would especially thank you for issue 247 which featured the in-depth look on two decades of *OutRun 2*. That article reminded me of how much I used to love to play *OutRun Online Arcade* on the PS3 with a late friend back in the day. To relive a fraction of the joy from yesteryear I bought a PS2 and a copy of *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast* and the second it booted up I was hooked! I've been playing it pretty much every day since I got it because the simplicity and its addictive gameplay keeps you thinking, "Just one more go." I didn't own a PS2 during its glory days so it was like opening a door to a whole new world for me and I've discovered so many great games that I've never played before like *The Warriors*, *Gradius V*, *Metal Gear Solid 2* and *3* and the *GTA* games to mention a few.

I've quickly gotten myself a collection of roughly 50 games now and I keep on discovering gem after gem in lots of different genres, so you guys really lit my flame again for retro games. *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast* has also become one of my favourite games of all time and my go-to game when I just want a quick blast of fun. So once again I would like to thank you and keep up the good work!

Kim Öhman

It's fantastic to hear how much you're enjoying the PS2, Kim. Whether someone's revisiting old favourites or discovering things they missed the first time around, stories like this are exactly what have kept us going for so long.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Big numbers

While we were working on this issue, just as issue 250 hit the shelves, Darran hit his own milestone – his 50th birthday! He celebrated the occasion with some very fine pasties, a film and close company. Thanks to a lovely gift from his wife, he also managed to tick a big item off his gaming wish list – *Castlevania: Legacy Of Darkness* for the N64. We said it on the day, but once more in print, happy birthday, Darran.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Call Of Duty moment?

Jason
The whole of the first game. It was the sequel I wanted to *Medal Of Honor: Frontline* that *Rising Sun* just wasn't.

Cedar Valley Gaming
All Ghillied Up – a very immersive atmosphere that creates an unsettling amount of tension in a series that empowers the player to engage in bombastic combat.

Phil Rowland
Unlocking Nacht Der Untoten for the first time. The original zombie mode and still the best.

Craig Taylor
Playing with my friends, crossplatform, across the globe too, in lockdown really showed us how important the game could be. Kept us together when the world was against us. Never thought it would enable that level of social interaction!

ACO
The nuke in *Call Of Duty 4*. My god! Just the shock of seeing this.

Zahir Hassan
The very first and second game of *Call Of Duty*, which showcases the horror of WWII from the first-person perspective. Also loved the fact that we can get to play as soldiers from different nationalities instead of just one.

Count_de_Moneey
The Pripyat mission from *Modern Warfare*. Played it on Xbox 360 with friends. We couldn't believe how good the game looked.

Andrew Walker
Getting the Platinum Trophy on *Black Ops*, it was the first Platinum I got and I got a few more on *COD* games. A great game, a great story and zombies was fun too.

Kevin Clarke
Modern Warfare 2 Search & Destroy lobbies were the peak of multiplayer gaming.

retro GAMER

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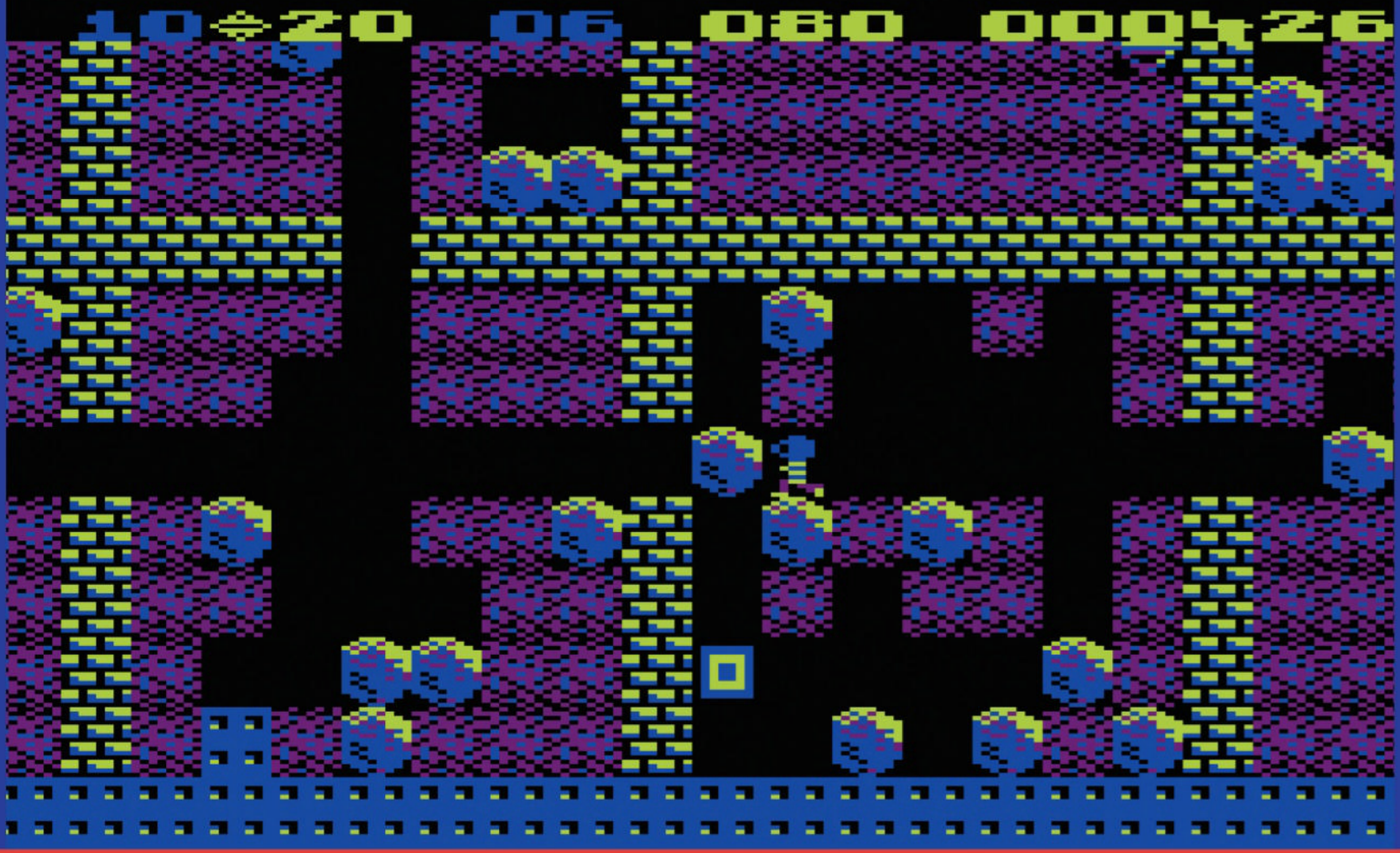

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7130866

Space Giraffe

MORE THAN JUST A TEMPEST CLONE

» XBOX 360 » 2007 » LLAMASOFT

Jeff Minter is an absolute legend. His studio Llamasoft has been around for over 40 years and in all that time he's remained on the fringes of gaming, determined to do his own thing. Sure, he's teamed up with some big names over the years and made quite a few versions of *Tempest* during that time, but he does what he wants and how he wants it. That may not have made him into the household name he clearly deserves to be, but you have to respect someone who refuses to bend their vision for the sake of money or fame.

And make no mistake, Jeff is a visionary genius, particularly when it comes to the shoot-'em-up genre – and *Space Giraffe* is one of the best examples of Jeff at his glorious, zany best. Yes, it looks enormously like *Tempest* at first glance, and yes it has a tutorial that almost doesn't want you to know how to maximise your scoring potential. It even has a psychedelic whirling background and thumping soundtrack that crop up in so many of Jeff's games – but it's also bloody fantastic, just like the vast majority of Jeff's shooters are.

One of the reasons I love shmups is because they distil gaming down to its purest form. Jeff clearly understands this and as a result most of his games are beautiful slices of twitch gaming. *Space Giraffe* might take a little while to understand all of its little intricacies – from being able to amass huge points by ramming enemies off a level's perimeter, to shooting enemy bullets to slow their trajectory – but when it finally clicks there's no turning back. Sixteen years on from its original Xbox Live Arcade release I'm still playing Jeff's game and it's still brilliant fun. Do yourself a favour and experience its brilliance for yourself. ✱

ENDGAME

BARBIE: GAME GIRL

» Do you see what they did with the title of this game, dear reader? They called it *Barbie: Game Girl*. Because it is on a Game Boy. If you ever needed evidence of the boundless creativity of marketing types, there it is. Oh, the plot? That's something about Barbie putting together an outfit for date night with Ken. Let's see how it goes...

01

» Our leading lady has acquired the final part of her ensemble, a lovely gown. Though she and Ken have been an item for years, she still puts some effort into date night to show how much she cares. It's sweet.

02

» Barbie enters the room, knowing that she looks the part – she always does. But tonight, she's a little unsure of how her latest venture has gone. Could this platformer really compete with *Super Mario Land*?

03

» "Honey, I told you I'd always be honest with you, and this game is no *Mario*," Ken tells her. "But it's not embarrassing either. If you want to see embarrassing, I hear they're doing a live-action *Mario* film."

04

» Barbie is perplexed. "So what can I do to make my mark on gaming?" Ken offers the suggestion that she wait a few years and release a game on the same day as something wildly different, then make a social-media meme out of it. "Maybe go for something like Barbeinhander?"

05

» "Don't worry, I've heard the editor of **Retro Gamer** will go to bat for *Barbie Horse Adventures*. Besides, you end up beating Mario at the box office," Ken reassures her, having apparently developed precognition. "The embarrassing film?" asks Barbie. "No, the billion-dollar one," says Ken.

HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN

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